Monopolising a Statehood Movement. Gorkhaland Between Authoritarian Parties and 'Aware Citizens'

Dissertation

zur

Erlangung der naturwissenschaftlichen Doktorwürde
(Dr. sc. nat.)

vorgelegt der

Mathematisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät

der

Universität Zürich

von

Miriam Wenner

aus

Deutschland

Promotionskomitee

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Müller-Böker (Vorsitz)
Dr. Urs Geiser
Prof. Dr. Shalini Randeria

Zürich, 2015

Summary (English)

Movements for new States in India are often interpreted as a sign of an increasing democratisation and decentralisation of political power. They are read as expressions of an "aware citizenry" which demands its rights and entitlements from the state, formulated in the language of recognition and autonomy. Contrary to such positive assumptions this thesis contends that instead of enabling a greater participation of the population in governance, movements for new States and concessions for autonomy can entail the establishment of regional competitive authoritarian regimes, where a dominant ethno-regional party regularly violates principles of substantial democracy.

To underline this argument I draw on insights from the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling. Here, the largely Nepali speaking population demands a new union State to be carved out of northern West Bengal. Succeeding the allegedly corrupt and repressive rule of the Gorkha National Liberation Front, in 2007 a new party, the Gorkha Liberation Front (GJM), revived the long standing demand for statehood. Under the slogans of "non-violence" and "democracy" the GJM also proclaimed a new political culture free from corruption and violent repression. Yet, the GJM dominates Darjeeling while allegedly repressing other regional parties advocating the ethno-regional agenda. The party is now the sole voice of the Gorkhaland movement recognised by the government. This raises the question of why a presumably "aware citizenry" participating in a movement voiced in the language of "democracy" and "non-violence" follows a party, when its alleged corrupt and repressive practices of ruling contradict such aspirations. Why did the succession in 2007 and the revival of the statehood movement not entail an overall regime change to a more democratic set-up?

This study has two aims. First, it intends to account for statehood movements' effects on regional political regimes, and for what they mean to those involved. It seeks to dismantle the "movement" paradigm by accounting for the movements' internal fractures, issues of representation, inclusion and exclusion, and their conflation with party politics. Defying clear-cut distinctions between "movement" and "party", I frame the Gorkhaland movement as a "party-political movement" and the dominant party as a "movement party". This conceptualisation allows analysing the Gorkhaland agitation through the prism of party political contestations enshrined by broader state policy.

The second aim of this study is to analyse the dominance of an ethno-regional party in the statehood movement and in Darjeeling. It seeks to understand how the political authority of the GJM is constructed. To do so it explores the strategies for ruling employed by the party and its leaders and contrasts these with their perception and evaluation by those over whom they seek to rule.

Conceptionally, I draw on two bodies of work: studies on authoritarian regimes based in comparative politics and anthropological studies on the construction of political authority in South Asia. The former identify repression, co-optation/patronage, and legitimacy as major strategies used by incumbents to maintain their power. Anthropological approaches complement these theories by underlining the context-specific and socially-contested conditions for ruling. This includes their capability to approach the considerations and constraints of the ruled in supporting or resisting an incumbent. Thereby they better account for an understanding of political authority as deriving from a qualitative, contested, and dynamic two-sided relationship between rulers and ruled.

In terms of methodology, I chose a qualitative approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm. I employed multi-sited ethnography to account for the multiple sites of the construction of political authority and performances of politics and the movement. Aside from party offices and sites of political performance such as public meetings, tea plantations were of particular importance as contested sites for political support in regional politics.

My study identified the GJM's construction and reference to the imaginative geography of Gorkhaland, the leaders' investment in his reputation as a strong, generous, and honest person, the establishment of resource monopolies over the developmental state, and the use of hard repression and violence against rivals as major strategies for ruling. The dominance of the GJM is supported by the regional autonomous council, which institutionalised the dependence-relation between the government and the dominant party.

The success of these strategies is dependent not only on a continuous supply of governmental patronage resources but also strongly related to specific historic and socio-economic factors, which frame their reception amongst the ruled. Although the ruled evaluate leaders according to different moral principles, for a majority pragmatic concerns and the longing for social and economic security pose the main hindrances to speak up against perceivably "bad" leaders. This renders the "aware citizens" in Darjeeling ultimately silent and has serious implications for the course, meanings, and effects of the statehood movement.

Instead of giving people a voice, the Gorkhaland movement is ultimately detrimental for a more substantial democracy in Darjeeling: The privileging of the ethno-regional agenda forecloses alternative ways to negotiate citizens' relations with the state and the identification of the state as the sole enemy of people obscures the roles local political leaders play for sustaining the very conditions against which people protest. Instead of uniting the population, the ruling party's rhetoric creates distinctions between so-called Gorkhaland lovers and enemies. This underlined the GJM's attempt to monopolise the movement as part of a struggle over political power, while denying rivals the right to contend for the common cause. Such party political capture eventually weakens the movements' programmatic base.

Ultimately, guided by pragmatism and material aspirations, a movement for decentralisation and "democracy" became an arena to acquire and struggle over material resources. For many followers, paying lip-service to Gorkhaland was a necessary requirement to become part of the "winning coalition" of a party, which continues to draw on the ethno-regional statehood agenda to derive its legitimacy.

Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

Bewegungen für die Gründung neuer Unionsstaaten in Indien werden oft als Zeichen einer zunehmenden Demokratisierung und Dezentralisierung politischer Macht gedeutet. Sie werden als Ausdruck einer „bewussten Bürgerschaft“ gelesen, die ihre Rechte gegenüber dem Staat mittels einer Sprache von Anerkennung und Autonomie einfordern. Im Widerspruch zu solch emanzipatorischen Lesarten zeigt meine Dissertation, dass Bewegungen für neue Staaten und Autonomiekonzessionen nicht unbedingt zu verstärkter politischer Partizipation der Bevölkerung führen, sondern stattdessen die Etablierung kompetitiver autoritärer Regime auf der regionalen Ebene fördern können. In diesen Regimen verletzt eine dominante ethno-regionale Partei regelmäßig und systematisch Prinzipien substantieller Demokratie.

Um dieses Argument zu belegen, beziehe ich mich auf die Bewegung für einen Unionsstaat Gorkhaland in Darjeeling. Hier fordert die überwiegend Nepali sprechende Bevölkerung die administrative Abspaltung von Gebieten des nördlichen West Bengalen. Im Jahr 2007 beendete dort eine neue Partei, die *Gorkha Liberation Front* (GJM), die als korrupt und repressiv kritisierte Herrschaft der *Gorkha National Liberation Front* und revitalisierte die seit langem bestehende populäre Bewegung für einen neuen Unionsstaat. Unter den Schlagworten „Gewaltlosigkeit“ und „Demokratie“ proklamierte die GJM eine neue politische Kultur frei von Korruption und gewaltvoller Repression. Dennoch wurde auch ihr bald vorgeworfen, Darjeeling mittels Repression anderer regionaler Parteien, die ebenfalls die ethno-regionale Agenda vertreten, zu beherrschen. Auch die Regierung erkennt einzig die GJM als Sprachrohr der Bewegung an. Dies wirft die Frage auf, warum scheinbar „bewusste Bürger/innen“, die sich in einer als „demokratisch“ und „gewaltfrei“ präsentierten Bewegung engagieren, einer Partei folgen, deren augenscheinlich korrupte und repressive Herrschaftspraktiken solchen Prinzipien widersprechen. Warum führten der Machtwechsel 2007 und die Wiederbelebung der Gorkhaland-Bewegung nicht zu einem Wandel des politischen Regimes hin zu mehr Demokratie?

Vor diesem Hintergrund verfolgt die vorliegende Dissertation zwei Ziele: Erstens strebt sie an, die Auswirkungen von Bewegungen für neue Staaten auf regionale politische Regimes nachzuzeichnen und die Bedeutungen solcher Bewegungen für die Beteiligten offen zu legen. Sie will die internen Brüche, Belange von Repräsentation, Inklusion und Exklusion innerhalb von sogenannten Bewegungen und deren Verschmelzung mit Parteienpolitik aufdecken. Dabei werden Unterscheidungen zwischen „Bewegung“ und „Partei“ überbrückt, indem die Gorkhaland-Bewegung als „parteipolitische Bewegung“ und die dominierende Partei als „Bewegungs-Partei“ konzeptionalisiert werden. Dies erlaubt es, die Bewegung in einem Kontext parteipolitischer Kämpfe - eingerahmt durch Politik auf anderen Ebenen - zu betrachten.

Das zweite Ziel der Studie ist, die Dominanz der regierenden ethno-regionalen Partei innerhalb der Bewegung sowie in Darjeeling zu analysieren. Um zu verstehen, wie die politische Autorität der GJM konstruiert wird, erkunde ich die Herrschaftsstrategien der Partei und ihrer Anführer/innen und kontrastiere sie mit ihrer Wahrnehmung und Beurteilung seitens derer, über die Herrschaft angestrebt wird.

Konzeptionell beziehe ich mich auf Studien zu autoritären Regimen aus der vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft und auf anthropologische Studien zur Konstruktion politischer Autorität in Südasien. Die ersteren identifizieren Repression, Kooptation/Patronage und die Schaffung von Legitimität als Hauptstrategien von Herrschenden zum Machterhalt. Anthropologische Ansätze ergänzen diese Theorien, indem sie betonen, dass die Bedingungen für Herrschaft immer kontextspezifisch und sozial umkämpft sind. So werden auch die Überlegungen und Einschränkungen der Beherrschten berücksichtigt, die deren Unterstützung von oder Widerstand gegen einen Herrscher beeinflussen. Politische Autorität wird hier demnach als Resultat einer qualitativen, umkämpften und dynamischen zweiseitigen Beziehung zwischen Herrschenden und Beherrschten begriffen.

Methodisch verfolgt diese Arbeit einer qualitativen, konstruktivistisch basierten Herangehensweise. Um die multiplen Orte der Konstruktion politischer Autorität einerseits und der Performanz von Politik und der Bewegung andererseits zu betrachten, verwende ich den Ansatz der „multi-sited ethnography“. Neben Parteibüros und Orten der politischen Performanz (wie etwa öffentliche Parteiveranstaltungen) waren insbesondere Teeplantagen als Orte, in denen Parteien um politische Unterstützung ringen, von besonderer Bedeutung.

Als wichtigste Herrschaftsstrategien der GJM identifiziert meine Studie die Konstruktion und den Bezug der Partei auf die imaginative Geographie von Gorkhaland, die Reputation ihres Anführers als stark, grosszügig und ehrlich, die Etablierung eines Ressourcenmonopols über Entwicklungsprogramme des Staates sowie Repression und Gewalt gegen Rivalen. Die Dominanz der GJM wird dabei von einem regionalen autonomen Council unterstützt, welcher die Abhängigkeitsbeziehungen zwischen der West Bengalischen Regierung und der dominierenden Partei institutionalisiert.

Der Erfolg dieser Strategien hängt nicht nur von der fortwährenden Versorgung mit Patronage-Gütern der Regierung ab, sondern auch von spezifischen historischen und sozio-ökonomischen Kontextfaktoren, welche ihre Wahrnehmung unter den Beherrschten beeinflussen. Obwohl die Beherrschten die Herrschenden anhand unterschiedlicher moralischer Prinzipien bewerten, halten pragmatische Überlegungen und der Wunsch nach sozialer und ökonomischer Sicherheit die Mehrheit von ihnen davon ab, als „schlecht“ erachtete Anführer offen zu kritisieren. Dies macht die „bewussten Bürger/innen“ in Darjeeling letztlich schweigsam und hat ernste Auswirkungen auf den Kurs, die Bedeutungen und die Effekte der Gorkhaland-Bewegung.

Statt den Belangen der Menschen eine Stimme zu geben, steht die Bewegung damit einer Demokratisierung in Darjeeling entgegen. Das Priorisieren der ethno-regionalen Agenda schliesst alternative Möglichkeiten für die Bürger zur Verhandlung ihre Beziehungen zum Staat aus. Mit ihrer Darstellung der West Bengalischen Regierung als Hauptfeind der Menschen verschleiert die Gorkhaland-Rhetorik die Rolle von lokalen politischen Führern, die genau die Bedingungen aufrechterhalten, gegen die die Menschen protestieren. Statt die Bevölkerung zu vereinen, spaltet die Rhetorik der regierenden Partei sie in sogenannte Gorkhaland-Befürworter und -Gegner. Dies unterstreicht den Versuch der GJM, in ihrem Kampf um politische Macht die Bewegung zu monopolisieren und Rivalen das Recht, für das gemeinsame Ziel zu kämpfen, zu verwehren. Eine solche parteipolitische Vereinnahmung der Bewegung schwächt letztlich deren programmatische Basis.

Geleitet von Pragmatismus und materiellen Ansprüchen, wurde eine Bewegung für Dezentralisierung und „Demokratie“ zu einer Arena des Kampfes über materielle Ressourcen. Das Lippenbekenntnis zu Gorkhaland wurde für viele zu einer notwendige Bedingung, um Teil der „Gewinnerkoalition“ der regierenden Partei zu bleiben. Diese bezieht sich weiterhin auf die ethno-regionale Agenda, um ihre Legitimität gegenüber den Beherrschten zu stützen.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. Not all of them can be named here, but I feel extremely grateful for their trust, time and encouragement in making this project work.

My committee members Ulrike Müller-Böker, Urs Geiser, and Shalini Randeria have accompanied me with critical advice, discussions, and suggestions since the beginning of this project and I want to express my sincere thanks for all their time and positive encouragement. My two-fold base at the University Research Priority Programme Asia & Europe and at the Department of Geography, University of Zurich helped thinking outside the box of my discipline. I am grateful for all the enhancing discussions with colleagues from my own and other disciplines.

I further want to thank David Gellner for facilitating my stay at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford; Aditya Nigam for his support at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi; R. Ramakumar for his help at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and Bishnu Upreti for helping me out in Kathmandu, Nepal.

This study also benefited from inputs of many other persons whom I want to thank for their time and engagement: Benedikt Korf for his supportive inputs during the initial stages of my research; Tanka B. Subba for his invaluable suggestions prior to my first field trip to Darjeeling; Pravesh Golay for his view on Darjeeling from the outside; Craig Jeffrey, Rana Behal, and Bart Klem for taking time to comment on my concept; Townsend Middleton and Jenny Bentley for their insightful comments on tribal associations and the Lepcha in Darjeeling; Tessa Pariyar for lending me her expertise on Nepal; and Dagmar Wujastyk for her advice on Sanskrit. I would also like to thank Martin Steinmann for his cartographic designs, C.P. Aryal for helping with Nepali translations and Asmita Chaudhuri and Simon Pare for proofreading the thesis. I further thank my colleagues and friends Silva Lieberherr, Craig Hatcher, Martina Locher, and Lena Fey for their support.

I am grateful to Regina Kohler, Olga Rix-Isakov, and Jayasree Jayanthan for helping me with the administrative work involved in this project.

I have presented and published parts of this project throughout its duration. I am very grateful for the feedback I received through peer-reviews and from the conference audiences, which helped me a lot in sharpening my approach.

In Darjeeling I am especially grateful to my host-families on the tea plantations. Without their support this project would certainly have met more limits. They guided me through the villages and

their love and trust always made me feel comfortable. My special thanks go to B. and S., S., Mahendra, and to T. and U. Sharma from Kalchini. I further feel greatly indebted to all those who participated in this research, mainly the innumerous *didīs* and *dājūs* from the tea plantations who welcomed me and taught me how to pluck and plant tea. Besides on the tea plantations I spent lots of time in a small road-side village, some time in Darjeeling and Kalimpong towns. Here, I would like to express my sincere thanks to S., M., Kundan and my friends from the shop; to Amar Lama for his insights; to A. for the long discussions in Kalimpong; to Mandu, Binita and T. for their critical views and friendship; to A. for allowing me to stay in his hotel despite of the *bandh*, to E. and A. for sharing their food, and to Col. D.S. Khadka and the members of the *Gorkhali Sudhar Sangh Bhavan* in Dehradun for facilitating my stay. My thanks also go to the Darjeeling District Library, and *Himalaya Darpan* for allowing me to use their archives. I also want to thank all those local, medium and upper-level political leaders and unionists from different parties who took their time to respond to my questions, especially to N. for his trust and openness. I further want to thank Vivek Chhetri, Niraj Lama and Anu Radha Sharma for their valuable suggestions and insights which brought this project a big step forward.

The funding of this research by the URPP Asia & Europe, the Humer Foundation for Academic Talent, the Swiss National Foundation and the NCCR North-South provided me not only with the possibility to conduct several field stays and participate in interdisciplinary workshops but also gave me the financial security to complete this project.

Certainly, writing a thesis is about more than just scientific work, and I am very grateful for the new friendships I found after moving to Zurich, and for the social support of my friends, colleagues and family. I want to thank all those persons from the Geography Department and the URRP for their company and friendship, and nice hours with tea, coffee and cake. I am especially grateful for the support of my parents who – although they never got the chance to study themselves – never questioned my decision to stay at university instead of “learning a proper occupation”, and for the encouragement of my partner who had to bear the stress of the last writing-phase with me.

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List of abbreviations

ABAVP	Akil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parisad (All India Adivasi Development Council)
AGSU	All Gorkha Student Union
AIGL	All India Gorkha League
	*funded in 1942. Its president Madan Tamang was murdered in May 2010.
BGP	Bharatiya Gorkha Parisang (India Gorkha Council)
	*National-level organisation of the Indian Gorkhas
BOBBBS	Bangla O Bangla Bhasa Bachao Samiti (Oh Bangla People! Save the Language - Committee)
BDO	Block Development Office
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI-M	Communist Party of India – Marxist
CPRM	Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists
	*funded in 1996 by rebel leaders of the Darjeeling CPI-M. R.B. Rai is its president.
DDUDF	Darjeeling Dooars United Development Foundation
	*"non-political" body floated in 2013 by M.P. Lama
DDCC	Darjeeling District Congress Committee
DGHC	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
EIC	East India Company
GATA	Gorkha Adivasi Territorial Administration
GDF	Gorkha Democratic Front
GJM	Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Gorkha People's Liberation Front)
	*Established in October 2007 by Bimal Gurung
GLP	Gorkhaland Personnel
GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front
	*Founded in April 1980. Its president Subash Ghisingh initiated a violent campaign for Gorkhaland from 1986-1988. Subsequently he became chief of the DGHC.
GRC	Gorkha Rastriya Congress (Gorkha National Congress)

GRNM	Gorkha Rastriya Nirman Morcha (Gorkha National Creation Front)
GTA	Gorkhaland Territorial Administration
GVC	Gorkha Volunteer Cell
	*Militant frontal organisation of the GNLF
ILTA	Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morch
INC	Indian National Congress
KMS	Krantikari Mutki Sena (Revolutionary Liberation Army)
MLA	Member of the State Legislative Assembly
MLLDB	Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MP	Member of Parliament (*Lok Sabha* or *Rajya Sabha*)
PM	Prime Minister
PMGSY	Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojanna
	*state financed road construction scheme
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TMC	All India Trinamool Congress
UNNF	United Nepal National Front

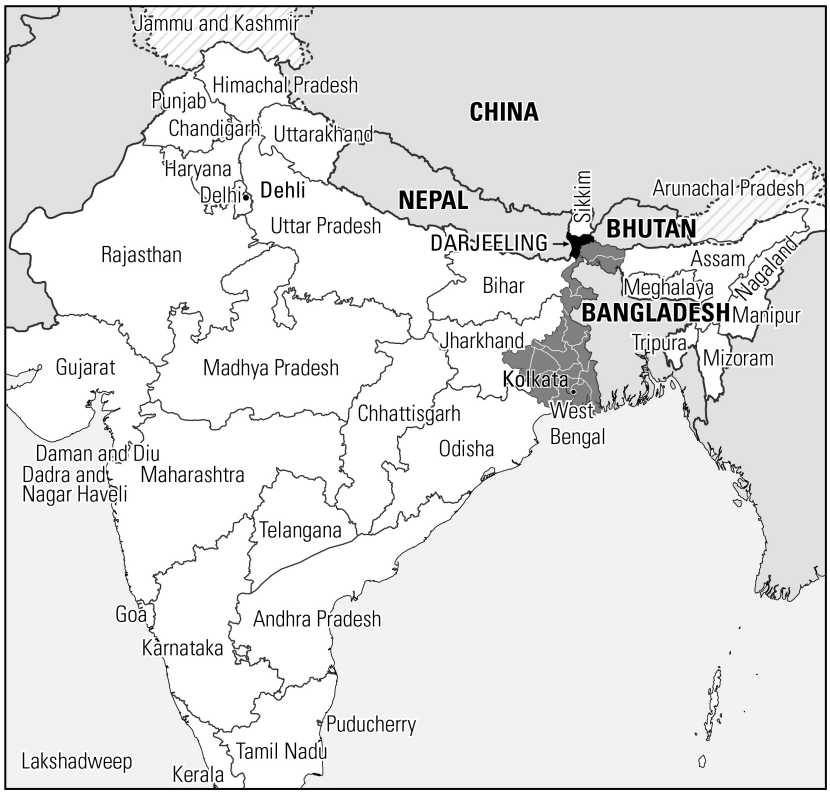
List of Nepali terms

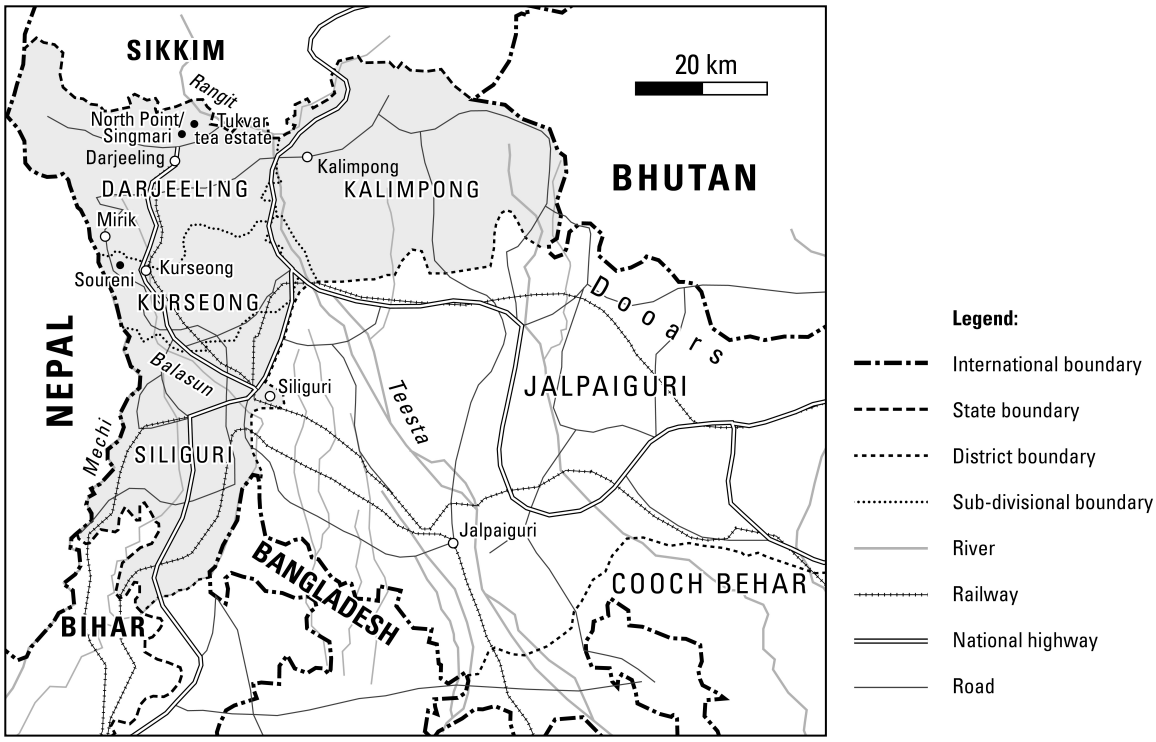
(as used in Darjeeling)

āndolaṇ	agitation; movement
bāhira	outside
bandh	general strike
bastī	village on the country side
bhitra	inside
bhrasṭachār	corruption
bhumī pūjā	religious prayer/ritual to sanctify the ground
chamchā	literally: spoon; term derogatorily used for “yes-men”, sycophants, creepers, bootlickers
chamchāgirī	the behaviour of *chamchās*
chaukidār	watchmen; for people in Darjeeling the term carries a derogatory meaning
chhyāsī	the number 86; here: the Gorkhaland agitation between 1986-1988
gaṇatantra; gaṇatantrik	democracy; democratic
ghoṭālā	scam, cozenage; in Darjeeling refers to the attainment of personal benefits from contract work by skimming money, e.g. by using minor construction materials or faking bills
gherau	form of protest where persons/structures are encircled by a chain of persons
jagā	land, ground
jantā	people
jāti	race, kind, sort; here mostly: ethnic group of the Gorkhas
kāryakartā	political activist; party-worker
khukurī	long knife with an inwardly curved edge; in Nepal and Darjeeling it is used as a tool and a weapon alike
māthi	up; above
māṭo	soil, ground
netā	political leader
prashakhā	smallest party-unit on the village level
sabhashād	elected member of a council (here: DGHC, GTA)

sachet jantā	"aware people"
samāj	socially inclusive, non-political organisation at the village level
shakhā	local party-unit on the village level; one *shakhā* consists of several *prashakhā*s
talako keṭāharu	"the young men from down"; idiom derogatorily used by town people for those stemming from the lower-lying tea plantation areas

Map of Darjeeling





Above: Darjeeling district and West Bengal in India. Below: Darjeeling district with its surrounding areas. Copyright and cartography by Martin Steinmann, GIUZ (2015).

Preface

When I explained to people in Darjeeling that the subject of my study was Gorkhaland, I often got the impression that the expectations towards me as an "international" researcher were very high. My project provided an international audience for their cause. While many were positively surprised and lauded the interest of a foreigner in their struggle for statehood, others often sarcastically expressed their disappointment with the seeming failure of the agitation since 2007. But this study is neither a book for nor against Gorkhaland, and I am sorry to disappoint those who asked me to conclude that "Gorkhaland was both necessary and possible". Rather, this book presents an attempt to look behind the "movement" and the struggle. It situates it in the broader context of the rule of a dominant party, which Darjeeling has experienced since the 1980s and which is closely related to people's struggle for autonomy.

I did not find it easy to give justice to my research subject and present it with the necessary depth, detail, and sensitivity that it certainly deserves. During my research I came across a big variety of different opinions, persons, and interpretations, which often made it hard for me to understand the broader structures in which the struggle over power in Darjeeling was situated. My attempt to draw an expansive story line forced me to selectively draw on certain events and details. I apologise in advance if I might have omitted discourses, which others see of equal importance. The particular choice of data I present here certainly arrives from the fact that I only began my research in 2010, when the revived agitation for statehood had already calmed down a bit, and people began to see things more critically. Probably, this book would have been written differently if I had been in Darjeeling in 2006 and 2007.

I also hope my study reflects the pace and dynamics of political events in Darjeeling, which might at times be confusing for the reader. While I was writing the last lines of this study in January 2015, Subash Ghisingh, the controversial president of the Gorkha National Liberation Front and initiator of the first Gorkhaland movement in the 1980s, died at the age of 79. Ghisingh had ruled Darjeeling for more than 20 years and his dead sent shockwaves through the always contested political landscape in Darjeeling. Owing to my decision to end the time-frame of this book with the 2014 national elections, however, I have not further commented on Ghisingh's demise here.

Despite the study's critical and often depressive outline, I hope I could give justice to the Gorkhaland agitation and to those who – inspite of all the "politics" – believe that their lives would improve through statehood.

A note on transcription and transliteration

Most of this research has been conducted in Nepali and English. It is important to note that many in Darjeeling mix their Nepali accounts with English words. For instance, the term "identity" was usually expressed in English; also "democracy" was used interchangeably with the Darjeeling-Nepali *gaṇatantra.* I indicated such English words in Nepali-accounts through simple quotation-marks and [Engl.] in brackets (e.g. 'identity' [Engl.]). To further qualify the meaning of certain Nepali terms in citations I sometimes added them in parentheses and italics behind the English translation (e.g. democratic (*gaṇatantrik*)). For these terms I used the transcription system as proposed by the *United States Board on Geographic Names* and the *Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use* (see: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/324997/Nepali_Romanization_System.pdf). If necessary I pluralised these terms by adding an 's' like in the English language. I did not use this transcription system for the names of organisations and instead have adopted the transliterations as used by them in their own presentations.

Pseudonymity

The political nature of my research subject made it necessary to render the names of many persons and places anonymous. I marked pseudonyms with an asterisk (*). However, I used the real names of most public persons (such as political leaders) and of some respondents who explicitly agreed on appearing under their real names. I made an exception in Chapter 8, where I used the real place name of a communist stronghold because the description of that place would give away its identity anyway.

1 Introduction: “Aware citizens”, movements and authoritarian regimes

1.1 The research puzzle

The 7th of October 2007 promised to be a special day in Darjeeling, a district in the foothills of the Indian Himalaya, in northern West Bengal. Bimal Gurung, a prominent political leader of the region, announced the establishment of a new organisation, the *Gorkha Janmukti Morcha* (Gorkha People’s Liberation Front, GJM or *Morcha*). At the founding meeting, attended by almost 20,000 excited people at the Motor Stand (*TT*, 8.10.2007)[1] close to the town’s main bazaar, Gurung not only promised to revive the long-standing demand of the largely Nepali-speaking population for a separate Indian Union State[2] of “Gorkhaland”, he also proclaimed an end of the rule of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Bolstered by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), which was established in 1988 as a compromise between the government and the GNLF to end the party’s violent statehood agitation from 1986-88, the GNLF had ruled Darjeeling for the last 20 years under the leadership of Subash Ghisingh.

Before a cheering crowd, Gurung began his speech by proclaiming a “new dawn” in Darjeeling (symbolised by the golden sun on the new party’s flag, see Picture 2 in Chapter 4). Coming down heavily on Ghisingh and his aides’ way of ruling, Gurung not only criticised their self-aggrandisement at the cost of poor people through their “eating up” of development funds to the DGHC, but also alleged that they had “pawned” the Darjeeling hills to the West Bengal government while giving up the struggle for Gorkhaland in return for personal benefits. Proclaiming an end to Ghisingh’s practice of buying political support, he announced: “Our brothers and sisters are *sachet* [conscious]. That’s why you cannot buy them with money anymore, because they love their mother [Darjeeling] and they love their land.”

Part of the proclaimed “new dawn” was Gurung’s announcement that he would lead the struggle for Gorkhaland in a “democratic (*gaṇatantrik*[3]), non-violent/peaceful (*shāntipriya)* and Gandhian” way, in contrast to Ghisingh’s armed uprising of 1986 (see Chapter 5). In Gurung’s rhetoric, the new movement should be inclusive and not party-political. People should stand at the apex and control

[1] As I quote from it many times, I shall use *TT* as an abbreviation for the *The Telegraph* newspaper.
[2] I use the upper case “State” to refer to the administrative unit (e.g. the State of West Bengal), and the lower case “state” for the larger polity.
[3] Unlike in Nepal, where *gaṇatantra* stands for “republic” and the term *prajātantra* is used to refer to “democracy”, the term *gaṇatantra* is used to mean democracy in Darjeeling. Leaders used both the English “democratic” and the vernacular *gaṇatantrik* interchangeably in speeches and interviews.

the leaders. These announcements are expressed in the vernacular of the *sachet jantā* or the aware/conscious/awake person, who will no longer allow leaders to betray them and their aspirations. Such proclamations clearly catered to those who had felt oppressed and neglected by Ghisingh over the last two decades, and appeared to usher in a "new era in local politics" (*The Hindu,* 15.3.2008). Within six months, Gurung put an end to Ghisingh's rule, and successfully established himself as the new majority leader and the GJM as the new dominant party in Darjeeling. He simultaneously initiated forceful agitation for Gorkhaland, mainly through public disobedience directed at the communist-led West Bengal State government.

The statehood demand stands in a broader historical context (see Chapter 3 for details). The Nepalis[4] of Darjeeling form a minority within the Bengali-dominated West Bengal State. Though this version is contested, popular history holds that the ancestors of most modern inhabitants of the hill district originally stemmed from the previous Gorkha Kingdom (present-day Nepal). The British colonial government had enticed thousands of them away by creating employment opportunities in the British Indian Army as "Gurkha" soldiers, or on the newly established tea plantations (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000). Most of present-day inhabitants of Darjeeling - who interchangeably call themselves "Gorkhas" or "Nepalis" (see Chapter 1.4.2) - believe that a separate State would guarantee their full recognition as Indian nationals, and mark the end of their perceived exploitation and neglect by the government. In this sense, the demand for Gorkhaland can be read as expressing their heightened awareness of their supposed political rights and a longing for justice as part of their political subjectivities. Bimal Gurung garnered a great deal of public support by catering to such aspirations.

When I began to study the Gorkhaland movement three years after the GJM's foundation, however, this optimist mood had dissipated. As early as 2010 the party had begun to engage in negotiations about an autonomous "interim council" instead of statehood. Eventually, in 2011, the *Morcha* signed an agreement for the establishment of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), an autonomous council under the purview of the newly elected West Bengal State government; this entity was to replace the former DGHC. Furthermore, various accounts criticised the GJM – a recognised political party since 2008 – for ruling through political patronage, corruption and the intimidation of regional rival parties that are also demanding Gorkhaland. It seemed that, contrary to Bimal Gurung's proclamations of a "new dawn" and the rise of *sachet jantā*, the change of party had not led to a genuine change of political regime in Darjeeling. Even after 2007 this regime continued to be characterised by the reign of a dominant party that claims to lead the statehood movement

[4] There has been some confusion over the terms Nepali or Nepalese (Sinha 2009, 15 ff). Since people in Darjeeling habitually call themselves "Nepali", I have chosen here to use the term "Nepalis" to refer to those living in India who speak the Nepali language, and "Nepalese" as an adjective when describing various cultural aspects.

while marginalising other regional parties and rival voices by ignoring the principles of substantial democracy.

Such observations seem to stand in stark contrast to common readings of statehood movements. Many studies regard these as expressions of a “spread of democracy” (Kohli 2001) and as the result of a heightened awareness of rights among citizens at the grassroots (Kothari, 1985). According to this reading, movements for new States have the potential to promote different forms of politics which allow for greater popular participation in governance (Kothari 1985; Kaviraj 1989). As I will show in detail below (Chapter 1.2), these studies’ preoccupation with the outcomes of movements in terms of concessions of autonomy on paper (Chadda 2002; Phadnis and Ganguly 2001; Kohli 1997a; Shah 2010; Adeney 2002; Bhattacharyya 2005) forecloses any focus on their effects on local and regional political regimes, practices and participants’ subjectivities. They therefore fail to account for the case of Darjeeling, where, paradoxically, the existence of a movement that draws on a language of rights and democracy *co-exists* with a regional authoritarian regime where such principles are regularly violated by a dominant party.

These contradictions have created the major puzzle with which this thesis is concerned. Assuming that movements for new States are indeed an expression of the emergence of *sachet jantā* (persons “aware” of their rights and aspiring for justice as embodied in the language of the statehood demand) then why did the overthrow of the GNLF as a dominant party by the GJM, and the revival of agitation for statehood in 2007 not inspire overall regime change towards more democracy? How could a party which allegedly employs violent means continue to sustain support from persons with aspirations for justice, freedom from exploitation, and recognition of their rights, as embodied in the language of the statehood demand? Why is the dominant party regime in Darjeeling so stable?

Critical evaluations of the 1986-88 Gorkhaland movement, and the concession of autonomy in form of the DGHC that resulted from it, go some way towards explaining such contradictions. They associate the power of the dominant party in Darjeeling with state patronage on the one hand, and with the party elites’ utilisation of an emotional ethno-regional appeal on the other (see Chapter 1.2.2). They suggest a conflation of the statehood agenda with local elites’ attempts to gain political authority on the one hand, and on the other point to the state’s role in establishing a dominant party through autonomous councils (Lacina 2009; Chakrabarty 2005; Sarkar 2013; Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000). Although I generally agree with such contentions, the primary concern of these studies with the relations between the ruling party and the state distracts attention from the relations between the dominant party, the movement and the masses. They fail to explain why there is public acceptance for the resulting political regime. Instead of exploring the reasons for people’s acceptance of, compliance with, or resistance to a dominant party, individuals and their perceptions

of the political regime remain unknown. Such readings not only avoid examining the rule of a dominant party as embedded in specific historical, socio-economic and cultural contexts, but also foreclose all possibility of resistance and political change, as they risk reducing those subject to rule to unreflective objects who blindly follow the appeal of ethno-regionalism. In short, they pay no attention to the ruled’s agency, perceptions and interpretations.

In this way they fail to address the inherent contradiction between ethno-regionalism as the basis of political support, and a government-supported political elite that rules through an autonomous council: Why would most of the population support a party which officially draws on the ethno-regional agenda while at the same time cooperating with the State government to rule an autonomous council which – in the opinion of many – is only a government-designed means to divert the ethno-regional statehood agenda based on which this party originally gained mass support? Why do people not instead follow another regional party that states a claim to Gorkhaland when the ruling party diverts from its main agenda?

In his extensive study on the 1986 GNLF agitation, T.B. Subba (1992) stressed the need to explore the relationships between leaders and the masses more closely (ibid. 192) and to see leaders as dependent on their respective political parties. He also pointed to the interrelations between social class divisions, local political power struggles and the violent turn the movement took in the 1980s. Similarly, Samanta (2000) made an attempt to dismantle the “movement” of the 1980s by digging into the internal structure and contradictions of the GNLF. Both studies provide important impetus for understanding the inherent contradictions of the statehood “movement”. I want to complement these by further exploring the party/movement/mass relations from the view of the ruled.

Research aims and research questions

In the context of the shortcomings in the study of statehood movements and the Gorkhaland agitation I have outlined above, this study has two aims. First, it intends to address the gaps identified by accounting for statehood movements’ effects on regional political regimes, and for what they mean to those involved. It seeks to dismantle the “movement” paradigm by accounting for the movements’ internal fractures, issues of representation, inclusion and exclusion, and their conflation with party politics. Second – but related to the first aim – this study attempts to analyse the dominance of an ethno-regional party in the statehood movement and in Darjeeling. It seeks to understand how the political authority of this party - the GJM - is constructed. To do so it explores the ruling strategies employed by the party and its leaders, and contrasts these with their perception and evaluation by those over whom they seek to rule.

The study pursues these aims by posing the following research questions:

- What are the incumbent party’s strategies for ruling? What are the limitations to its rule?
- How are such strategies for ruling perceived and evaluated by the ruled? Why would presumably “aware citizens”, who wish to secure their rights, lend support to or accept a party whose ways of ruling through corruption and repression apparently contradict such aspirations?
- What are the relations between the statehood movement and the dominant party regime? Does the movement help to sustain the regime, and, if so, in what way?

The attempt to analyse the effects of the statehood movement on regional political regimes makes it necessary to depart from the national and State level concern of many studies on statehood movements (Chadda 2002; Phadnis and Ganguly 2001; Kohli 1997a; Shah 2010; Adeney 2002; Bhattacharyya 2005). Instead, following the suggestion of Heller (2009) who found that “the problem of democratisation [in India] lies less in the institutions of democracy or the party system [...] than in the *political practices* and channels that link civil society to the State” (ibid. 133, my emphasis), I propose that one must focus on the *practices* of statehood movements if one wishes to understand their effects. This includes a study of the “local” life of such movements as embodied and enacted in quotidian social and political practice. This study therefore opted for an approach grounded in social science, which attempts to understand political structures through the prism of social and political practice (cf. Giddens 1984). I propose that only closer examination of the strategies for ruling in relation to their public perception and reproduction will help to solve the puzzle of the co-existence of *sachet jantā* and authoritarianism in Darjeeling.

The explicit focus on local perceptions and political practices not only complements existing critical studies on the Gorkhaland agitation and the political regime in Darjeeling, but as I will explain in Chapter 1.3, it also adds to an understanding of the qualitative relations between rulers and ruled in regimes dominated by one political party.

As mentioned above, the Gorkhaland movement is historically strongly associated with regional parties that draw their legitimacy from the same ethno-regional agenda. To account for this close conjuncture of the statehood demand with regional parties, and the co-existence of the statehood movement and the authoritarian regime I attempt to contextualise the research into statehood movements with a view of research into political authority and party political contestations. Thus, instead of treating movements and parties separately – both empirically and conceptually – the study compares and contrasts them in a new way. The study thus contributes to a better

understanding of the regional effects of statehood movements on the one hand and to the persistence of dominant party regimes under national democratic set-ups on the other.

This brings me to the main proposition of this study. I propose that in Darjeeling there is not only a co-existence of authoritarian regime and statehood movement but also that the two are strongly related and dependent. I assume that instead of leading to greater democratisation and grassroots participation, agitations for new States can imply and foster the establishment of regional “competitive authoritarian regimes” (cf. Levitsky and Way 2002) which are dominated by powerful ethno-regional parties. These parties’ privileging of the ethno-regional agenda as a major means for mobilisation and legitimation ultimately shuts down alternative ways for people to negotiate their relations with the state.

To substantiate this thesis I draw on two bodies of work: studies on authoritarian regimes based in comparative politics; and anthropological studies on the construction of political authority in South Asia. As I will further elaborate in Chapter 1.3, studies on dominant party regimes or competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2002; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010) identify repression, co-optation/patronage and legitimacy as major strategies used by incumbents to maintain their power before other rival parties (Gerschewski 2014; Greene 2010; Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013). Anthropological approaches complement these largely national analyses. They not only help to account for my understanding of political authority as deriving from a qualitative, contested and dynamic two-sided relationship between rulers and ruled. They also enable me to approach the qualitative relations between rulers and ruled at the local level, and the ruled’s reasons for lending support to, or complying with, certain leaders.

In terms of methodology, I chose a qualitative approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011; Kubik 2009; Schatz 2009). This not only enables me to assess the qualitative relationships between rulers and ruled, and strategies for attaining political authority and their perceptions, but also to account for the different meanings, interpretations and performances of politics. I chose a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus 1995) to account for the multiple sites of these constructions and performances (see Chapter 2). Aside from party offices and sites of political performance such as public meetings, tea plantations were of particular importance as contested sites for political support in regional politics (see Chapter 1.4). The juxtaposition of these views from different sites and sources makes it possible to display the multiple and often contradictory perspectives of actors involved in the statehood movement, and in the two-sided construction of political authority. Case studies illustrate these findings. The methods I apply include participant and non-participant observation, different forms of interviews, and document analysis.

In studying these questions I focus on the revived Gorkhaland agitation since 2007. Accordingly, this study primarily covers the period from October 2007 – the founding of the GJM – to July 2013. In a few cases I also add observations from briefer stays in December 2013 and October 2014. I embed this analysis with a view on historical developments in Darjeeling since the 19th century, including pre-and post-Independence politics, the first Gorkhaland movement (1986-1988), and the reign of the GNLF till 2007/08. For the sake of completeness, I have also added some information - largely based on newspaper reports – up to the March 2014 national *Lok Sabha* elections.

To answer the research questions I introduced above, the subsequent chapters of this study are as follows. Chapter 1.2 develops the aforementioned approaches to the study of statehood movements and political authority, and provides more detailed background information about Darjeeling and the statehood claim. I contextualise this within a broader review of literature about movements for new States in India. I contrast positive accounts of such movements with a critical assessment of their effects and outcomes. I then show why a different approach is required to understand the Gorkhaland movement and its effects on the regional political regime. In Chapter 1.3 I introduce approaches to the study of authoritarian regimes as valuable entrance points for understanding the dominance of the GJM over the Gorkhaland movement through an analysis of the strategies incumbents in such regimes employ to gain and maintain their political authority. After a critical evaluation of these theories, largely based on comparative politics, I propose to employ anthropological approaches to understand better how political authority emerges from the relations between rulers and the ruled. Chapters 4 to 7 detail these theoretical approaches. As my study attempts to better understand the side of the ruled by including their perceptions and evaluations of rulers, it is necessary to appropriately situate their perspectives in their respective historical, socio-economic and cultural contexts. To do so, Chapter 1.4 provides an overview of Darjeeling’s economy, development indicators, demography and history. As a majority of rulers’ and the ruled’s accounts stems from people residing and working on Darjeeling tea plantations, this section also provides a detailed background of these.

Chapter 2 substantiates my epistemological approach and describes the methodology employed in this study. It also comments on my positionality and the political implications of this study.

Chapter 3 situates the topic in a historical context by reviewing the emergence of ethno-regionalism in Darjeeling in relation to political process and party politics since the colonial time. This chapter combines insights from existing studies with archival data and interviews, and is concerned with the time-span between the 19th century and 2007.

Chapters 4 to 7 then take a closer look at the present political regime in Darjeeling since 2007, and analyse the GJM’s strategies for ruling and their reception in detail. These chapters account more explicitly for the perceptions of the ruled. Chapter 4 researches why the ethno-regional agenda – after 2007 – continues to appeal so strongly to people in Darjeeling. This chapter draws mainly on the approach of Anthony Smith (Smith 1996a; Smith 1996b; Smith 1996c) to understand the construction of ethnic identities, and other studies on regionalisation and imaginative geographies (Reuber 1999; Radcliffe 1998; Paasi 2002a). A comparison of political leaders’ rhetoric and public aspirations reveals the fractures in the Gorkhaland imagination and raises serious questions about party-leaders’ representation of the public. It also shows how the Gorkhaland agenda has been employed by political leaders to marginalise rivals and alternative imaginations of Darjeeling.

Chapter 5 takes a closer look at how and why Bimal Gurung and his new party, the GJM, gained power in Darjeeling in 2007, and reviews the processes leading to the GNLF’s ousting in 2008. Drawing on anthropological studies on leadership and reputation in South Asia (Bailey 1988; Bailey 1971; Price and Ruud 2010a; Alm 2006), it proposes that it was in particular Gurung’s reputation as a social worker and strongman that helped him to mesmerise the masses. An evaluation of popular perceptions of Gurung, however, reveals that after gaining power he slowly lost public trust. This suggests that the GJM maintains its rule through other means. These are subject to discussion in the following two chapters, which focus on the time span between 2008 and 2012.

Chapter 6 analyses the role of political patronage and so-called “money power”. Drawing on literature on clientelism, patronage, corruption, and “machine politics” (Greene 2010; Piliavsky 2014a; Chandra 2003; de Wit 1996) I show how intra-party patronage, distributed along hierarchical chains of the organisation, helped the party president to bind activists to him through promises of developmental contracts and other state benefits. In such a competitive system within the party, the violent oppression of rivals emerges as a means for activists to make claims on the party leaders. Simultaneously, the evolving exclusionary structures give rise to public criticism of leaders and diminish their reputation as social workers.

Chapter 7 further looks into the role of hard repression as a strategy for ruling. Drawing on Brass’ (1997) suggestion of a “functional utility” of violence and a call to show attentiveness to interpretations and performances of violence (ibid.; Hansen 2001; Gorringe 2006a) it not only shows how hard repression sustains fear amongst the population and oppresses dissent. It also displays how leaders reinterpret such incidents to maintain an image of a “democratic and non-violent” party.

Chapter 8 then contrasts the GJM’s practices for ruling with attempts for resistance, which takes different forms in Darjeeling hills. I will show that these attempts began to emerge more clearly since 2010 and have intensified especially after the GTA agreement in 2011 and its establishment in 2012.

Chapter 9 summarises the results in order to answer the research questions.

1.2 Gorkhaland and movements for new States

A stroll through the green, hilly landscape of Darjeeling district, famous for its tea and as a domestic and international tourist destination, reveals barely anything of the violent history of this former British hill station. Tourists travelling up from the dusty business hub of Siliguri in the district’s plains to the Darjeeling hills[5], which comprise Kurseong, Kalimpong and Darjeeling sub-divisions, are welcomed by colourfully painted houses pitched against the steep slopes in the midst of miles of tea plantations. If they are in luck, on a clear day they can spot the impressive massif of the Kanchenjunga, the world’s third-highest mountain, whose snow-white peaks seem to float above these dark-green Himalayan foothills. The mountain lies between Nepal and Sikkim, the State to the north. Darjeeling once belonged to this former kingdom before its king ceded it to the East India Company in 1835. West of the district lies Nepal, to the east is Bhutan, and to the south-east it borders Bangladesh (see Map, p. xxi). Old colonial remains are a reminder of Darjeeling’s times as a British hill station and the summer capital of the Bengal presidency.

However, Darjeeling’s picturesque exterior is deceptive, as the region has witnessed a long history of political uproar, largely connected with demands for territorial autonomy and an administrative separation from the West Bengal State. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, members of the local elite demanded a separation of the region dominated by a Nepali-speaking population, the so-called “Gorkhas”. Throughout the 20th century, such demands were reiterated by different political outfits, amongst them the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) which demanded the creation of a separate State since 1948. Administrative separation of the geographically and culturally distinct region, they argued, would ensure adequate representation of the Nepali-speaking minority in state governance. In 1946 and 1947 the Communist Party of India (CPI) even proposed to create a new nation state of “Gorkhasthan” comprising Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling. None of these demands was successful, and Darjeeling remained part of West Bengal State.

[5] In the following, I use the term ‘Darjeeling’ or ‘Darjeeling hills’ to refer to its three hill sub-divisions (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong), ‘Darjeeling district’ for the whole district including its Siliguri sub-division in the plains, and ‘Darjeeling town’ for the administrative headquarters of the district (see Map, p. xxi).

The demand for Gorkhaland itself was first raised in 1980 by the newly established *Pranta Parishad,* and then – more forcefully – by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and its charismatic leader Subash Ghisingh. He proposed to carve out the new State from Darjeeling district and the adjoining areas of the Dooars on the southern fringes of Bhutan, although the Nepali-speaking population was not in a majority there. Only a separate State, according to Ghising, would guarantee the Gorkhas a recognised Indian identity, and put an end to their perceived stigmatisation as citizens from Nepal. Drawing on a mix of socio-political anxiety and ethnic agenda, Ghisingh mobilised the masses for a violent agitation for statehood which was mainly directed against the Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M)-led West Bengal State government, which strictly opposed the creation of Gorkhaland. Between 1986 and 1988, the civil-war-like violent agitation, in which GNLF activists and state-backed CPI-M activists fought each other, left an estimated 1,200 persons dead (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Lama 1994). Eventually, in 1988, Ghising signed a tripartite agreement with the State and central government for the establishment of a regional council - the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). The council comprised the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling district (Kalimpong, Kurseong, Darjeeling) and a few adjoining areas of the Siliguri sub-division. It ceded certain administrative powers to an elected hill government and received funding from the central and State governments.

Importantly, administrative overlaps between the DGHC's constituencies and the three-tier *panchayat* system[6] created an exceptional system of local governance in Darjeeling. In 1992, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act effectively dispossessed the three Darjeeling hill sub-divisions of 2 tiers of the 3-tier *panchayat* structure. It not only dissolved the district or *zilla parishad* (till then including the Siliguri sub-division). Although the *panchayat samitis* at the intermediary block level were not dissolved, they were never elected and did not actually function, so that only the local *gram panchayats* remained as locally elected bodies, albeit under the supervision of the DGHC. Unlike in the three hill sub-divisions, the Siliguri sub-division has a full three-tier *panchayat* structure. Here, in 1989 a separate *mahakuma parishad* (sub-divisional council) was established in place of the previous district-wide *zilla parishad* (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000). The latter only exercises authority over the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district. This set-up not only led to a partial separation of the Siliguri sub-division from the overall district administrative structure. For the hill sub-divisions, it also led to a higher concentration of powers in the DGHC, while crippling local participation in governance (Chakrabarty 2005).

[6] The constitutional three-tier *panchayat* system in India includes the *gram panchayats*, locally elected self-government institutions that implement state programmes at the local level. These send representatives to the *panchayat samiti* at block level and to the *zilla parishad* at district level. The *panchayats* receive funding from the State and central government, and are regarded powerful institutions at the grassroots.

The GNLF won all the five-yearly DGHC elections, and GNLF president Ghisingh became the council’s chairman, putting it entirely in the hands of the GNLF and its councillors for the coming 19 years. But Ghisingh’s perceived hobnobbing with the West Bengal government, the failure to deliver the development he had promised, allegations of corruption and repression of rivals, and the perceived rollback on the Gorkhaland agenda added to the growing public apprehensions. Yet none of the other existing regional parties which continued demanding Gorkhaland was able to capitalise on the growing anti-incumbency mood and, backed by the West Bengal government, Ghisingh remained the unchallenged ruler of Darjeeling. Until, that was, Bimal Gurung - himself a GNLF leader - entered the stage on 7th October 2007.

Bimal Gurung capitalised on the growing dissent and established a new organisation, the *Gorkha Janmukti Morcha* (GJM), which subsequently took over the rule from the GNLF, chased Ghisingh out of the hills and revived demands for Gorkhaland. Like Ghisingh in 1986, the GJM mobilised the masses by promising them that Gorkhaland would guarantee their recognition as genuine Indian citizens, and address their developmental grievances. Unlike in 1986, however, the movement against the West Bengal government was announced as “non-violent” and drew largely on forms of public disobedience.

After having announced a “new dawn” for Darjeeling in October 2007 at a massive public meeting in Siliguri in May 2008, Gurung further underlined his different approach to politics, which he promised would revolutionise relations between leaders and followers:

> It is time for leaders to do politics passively, and for people to do it actively. It is people’s responsibility to watch: What does the leader eat? Where does he go? What vehicle does he ride? In what kind of building does he reside? [...] We are here to make people ‘conscious’ [Engl.]. (speech, 7.5.2008)

Gurung also announced that the new agitation would not be led in the same way as a political party, instead declaring the GJM an umbrella organisation of the *jāti* (race, group, kind), while asking members of other Gorkha parties to leave their leadership behind and instead to unite under a common flag until Gorkhaland was achieved:

> So I am declaring that this is not a party flag but a *jāti* flag. So you all, leave your [party-] flags and come here! Come under this flag and we will get Gorkhaland. You can be whatever you want to be: a leader, a chairman, or home minister. But first get Gorkhaland. (speech, 7.10.2007)

After ousting Ghising, the GJM’s dominance was bolstered by its recognition as the sole negotiation partner of the then CPI-M-led State and Congress-led central government. Such negotiations – supported by various tactics of public disobedience such as general strikes or *gheraus* (encircling with

a human chain) of government offices in Darjeeling – eventually led to the proposition of an "interim council" (*Indian Express,* 19.3.2010). But in July 2011 it was not the CPI-M, but the newly elected West Bengal Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) who succeeded in establishing this new council on paper (*The Hindu,* 19.7.2011).

Thus, instead of succeeding with the statehood demand, after a four-year agitation, the GJM signed a tripartite agreement with the State and central government for the creation of a new council. This "Gorkhaland Territorial Administration" (GTA) was to replace the DGHC, and was presented by the GJM as a stepping stone towards Gorkhaland (especially due to the word "Gorkhaland" in its name). Importantly, instead of party president Gurung, it was General Secretary Roshan Giri who signed the agreement so that Gurung could keep his hands clean (see Chapter 8 for more information about the GTA).

One major setback for the GJM was, however, its failure to increase the area the council commanded. The "Sen Committee", which had been created to evaluate the *Morcha*'s claim to the Dooars ceded only 5 *mouzas*[7] (of the 398 *mouzas* demanded) to the new council (*TT,* 10.6.2012). Despite of the GJM's outrage on this recommendation and threats to start a new agitation for Gorkhaland, the party leaders eventually agreed to participate in the GTA elections, which were held in July 2012 under the authority of the State government. Most other regional parties boycotted the elections, so the GJM won virtually uncontested, and since then formally controls the GTA and a bulk of the development funds flowing into Darjeeling from the government. GJM president Bimal Gurung became the elected chief of the GTA. Despite the GJM's inability to achieve Gorkhaland and to add areas of the Dooars to the GTA, the party-supported candidates won the 2014 *Lok Sabha*[8] elections by a huge margin (see Table 1).

1.2.1 The decentralisation thesis

Stories of demands for ethnically or linguistically based statehood, and the granting of autonomy concessions by the government in form of regional councils are not unique to Darjeeling. After independence, the Indian state witnessed a long period of such demands, and the constitutional enshrinement of the possibility for States' territorial reorganisation testifies to the government's realisation that this might be necessary to accommodate demands from groups expressing all the

[7] *Mouza* is an administrative unit. One *mouza* comprises several *gram panchayat*s.
[8] *Lok Sabha* refers to the lower house of the national Indian parliament; the *Rajya Sabha* (Council of States) is the upper house. Members to the *Lok Sabha* (maximum 552) are directly elected every five years. Most members of the *Rajya Sabha* (maximum 250) are elected by the respective State governments; twelve are nominated by the Indian president. Both houses have equal participation in legislature, but owing to its larger size the *Lok Sabha* is more powerful.

ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of a post-colonial setting (Kaviraj 1989; Shastri and Wilson 2001; Chadda 2002; Bhattacharyya 2005)[9].

Table 1: Election results for Darjeeling hills (Darjeeling Kalimpong, Kurseong). Sources: ^Assorted Thougthz (2009); ^^Indian Election Affairs (2011); ^^^personal communication Saman Pathak (CPI-M)

2009 – Lok Sabha^*

BJP/GJM	CPI/CPI-M	INC	Others
411,739	11,421	13,132	4,362

*2011 – West Bengal State Assembly^^*

GJM	GNLF	AIGL	CPI/CPI-M	INC	Others
343,931	42,605	17,513	12,711	10,134	5,963

*2014 – Lok Sabha^^^*

BJP/GJM	TMC/GNLF	M.P. Lama**	CPI/CPI-M	INC	Others	NOTA***
289,017	91,271	52,563	5,546	6,487	2,361	8,309

* Not contested by GNLF; AIGL and CPRM supported BJP/GJM combine

** Independent candidate, supported by AIGL, CPRM, BGP

*** None of the above, option introduced in 2014

Ceding to the pressure of public movements that started to emerge shortly after Indian Independence, the Union government under Prime Minister Nehru established a States Reorganisation Commission (SCR) as early as 1953. Based on its recommendations, the existing administrative units were reorganised in 1956, resulting in 14 States organised along linguistic lines; the number of States has since doubled. In the late 1970s and 1980s the ethnically diverse north-eastern parts witnessed the creation of five new States along cultural and linguistic lines to appease tribal insurgency, and in 2000 the then BJP Union government created Uttarkahand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, officially for administrative reasons (Bhattacharyya 2005; Beck, Destradi, and Neff 2010). In 2013 the national Congress-led government responded to the long-standing demand for Telangana to be carved out of Andhra Pradesh, which thus became India's 29th State in 2014. But despite this wide-reaching reorganisation there are still more demands for autonomy pending. The demand for Gorkhaland is but one of about 30 statehood demands, amongst them the ones for Bodoland (Assam), Vidharbha (Maharasthra), and Bundelkhand (Uttar Pradesh/Madhya Pradesh). Nearly all of these demands are formulated within the framework of an Indian nation state, and are therefore not secessionist but "sub-national" (Baruah 1997).

[9] Various studies on statehood movements and reorganisation have discussed their effects on the integrity of the Indian nation. Contrary to fears that it would lead to a "Balkanisation" of India, most studies found that reorganisation strengthens national unity and demonstrates the ability of the Indian state to "accommodate" demands for autonomy through diverting power to lower levels (Kohli 1997a; Chadda 2002; Ganguly 2005; Shah 2010).

Many authors see the emergence of groups demanding statehood as resulting from unfulfilled hopes and expectations towards the state which failed to live up to its promises of delivering symbolic or material goods such as recognition of (ethnic) identities and lifestyles, or the provision of development and welfare (Kothari 1985; Corbridge 1987; Kumar 2001; Shastri and Wilson 2001; Phukon 2002; Mawdsley 1997; Mawdsley 2002; Nilsen 2007; Karlsson 2013)[10]. In this reading, movements for autonomy are not against the state per se, or the state as system, but emerge because of the state's lack of capacity to deliver what people regard as their rightful entitlements.

Samaddar (2005) sees such aspirations for autonomy related to the rise of new political subjectivities. Drawing on Chatterjee’s (2004) “politics of the governed” he understands autonomy as resistance to the power of the state. For him, it is a “symbol for the emerging patterns of new spaces in politics, spaces that speak of rights and justice” (ibid. 9). Autonomy indicates collective actions, political and autonomous practices which form the political subject “in contradistinction to the existence of governmental realities of this world” (Samaddar 2005, 10). This account resembles what Hansen has called the emergence of “plebeian identities” (Hansen 2001, 9), referring to citizens who draw on a rhetoric of entitlements, rights and political aspirations to place increasing demands on the state.

Rajni Kothari (1985) positively evaluated statehood movements in India as an expression of an increasingly assertive grassroots politics. They form part of what he called the “non-party political process”. Movements for regional autonomy, he writes, “represent strong expressions of the will of the people and their rejection of the ruling establishment” (ibid. 345). As a form of a new political movement they are based on a “deep stirring of consciousness” (ibid. 341) and a growing awareness of rights aimed at the state. Such grassroots movements “are to be seen as attempts to open alternative political spaces outside the usual arenas of party and government [...]” (ibid.). In contrast to the established political parties, Kothari regards grassroots movements as more radical, as “attempts at redefining politics” (ibid.), seeking new forms of organisation and new conceptions of political roles (ibid. 342) to “interven[e] in the historical process” (ibid. 341).

[10] Amongst the questions examined by studies on statehood movements are critical evaluations of governmental approaches towards ethno-regionalism, including discussions of Indian federalism and mechanisms for power-sharing (Manor 1996; Kohli 1997a; Adeney 2002; Chadda 2002; Samaddar 2002; Wyatt, Zavos, and Hewitt 2002; Bhattacharyya 2005; Benedikter 2009b; Lacina 2009; Majeed 2010; Rudolph and Rudoloph 2010; van Schendel 2012), studies of the changing bases of States’ reorganisation (Bhattacharyya 2001; Majeed 2003; Kumar 2010; Tillin 2011; Tillin 2013), of the relations between ethno-nationalism and nationalism (Baruah 1997; Mawdsley 2002; Baruah 2005; Das 2005; Beck, Destradi, and Neff 2010), and the formation of ethnic identities and political subjectivities (Mawdsley 1999;Samaddar 2005; Shneiderman and Tillin 2015).

Some authors relate self-determination movements to an increasing democratisation and decentralisation of the Indian polity. Kohli (2001, 2) and Kaviraj (1989) interpret the emergence of social and people's movements, including self-determination movements, as expressions of a "spread of democracy" (Kohli 2001, 2; Sangvai 2007; see also Nilsen 2007), and Kothari views them as "part of a larger democratic struggle [...] providing local responses to national crises" (Kothari 1985, 345). This process is seen as being fostered by the emergence of movements organised along caste or ethnic lines who have demanded a greater share of the state's resources since the 1970s (Kaviraj 1989; Sangvai 2007).

Kaviraj (1989) framed regionalist movements at the grassroots as a counter-tendency to the centralising drives of the Indian central government in the 1980s[11]. He argued that demands for regional autonomy were an expression of a "democratic struggle for achieving a more participant and decentralised polity and society" (Kaviraj 1989, 13). Self-governance and decentralisation, so his contention, would bring the state "closer" to the citizens and entail a diversion of power from the centre to the grassroots resulting in a new power balance.

In these readings written in the tradition of what I call the "decentralisation thesis", demands for a redistribution of power are an expression of the spread of democracy (Kohli 2001, 2) accompanied by a rapidly politicised body politic (Kohli 1997a, 328; Kohli 2001, 9).

This "decentralisation thesis" appealed to many subsequent works on the reorganisation of the States. Wyatt et al. (2002) for instance interpret the granting of autonomy in form of new Union States as part of a broader "decentring" of the Indian state. Further, in line with the "spread of democracy" proposal, many authors continued to approach statehood movements as expressions of an increasingly conscious citizenry making justified demands on the state (Corbridge 1987; Mawdsley 1997; Mawdsley 1999; Rangan 2004; Nilsen 2007)[12]. Such readings inherently suggest that statehood movements are a form of "social movement", a point I critically discuss further below.

[11] Kaviraj sees this centralisation in the concentration of political power in the hands of a few individuals at the centre who disempower State governments and undermine federalism. This led to an "authoritarian rule" of Rajiv Gandhi at that time (Kaviraj 1989, 12).

[12] Such positive associations with statehood movements are also reflected in the attributes used to label them. While some authors call them "self-determination movements" (Kohli 1997) or "autonomy movement" (Bhattacharjee 1996), thereby stressing their decentralisation agenda, others focus more on the ethno-regional and mobilisation aspects, naming them "ethnic movements" (Kohli 1997a; Barbora 2005), "ethno-regional movement" (Wenner 2013) or "regional movements" (Mawdsley 1997). Some additionally qualify their non-secessionist character by labelling them either "sub-nationalist movements" (Chima 2009; Baruah 1997) or "non-secessionist" (Mawdsley 1997).

1.2.2 The darker side of statehood movements

Although I agree with the decentralisation thesis's view of statehood movements as expressions of a more "aware citizenry" formulating their demands for rights towards the state, the example of Gorkhaland and other experiences with autonomy concessions and statehood agitations seem to contradict other positive associations. These concern the conviction that movements for new States (i) are expressions of a more assertive and distinct non-party political process; (ii) are actually representing those in whose names autonomy concessions are demanded by movement leaders; and (iii) that they are successful in establishing a greater access to the state through promoting administrative and territorial reform. I propose that these assumptions foreclose the view on the actual effects movements and agitations have on the respective regional political regimes, e.g. the establishment of authoritarian structures characterised by repression and corruption as described in the Darjeeling case above.

Indeed, contrary to the decentralisation thesis's assumptions, various critical studies on the effects of autonomy movements or autonomy concessions suggest a stark discrepancy between the proclaimed ideological contents of movements in terms of decentralisation, self-governance and recognition, and their actual practices and effects. Defying a clear-cut separation of movements and party politics, Tillin's (2013) extensive evaluation of the processes leading to the creation of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand in 2000 suggests, for instance, that such movements should not be treated separately from their specific regional and broader State and national party-political context. The boundaries between social movement and party politics are fuzzy. She argues that statehood became the lowest common denominator amongst different groups – including social movements and regional and national political parties – who pursued different visions about the States to be granted. This "compromise politics" (ibid. 24) entailed the suppression of some ideological content of social movements (ibid. 108)[13]. This is stated by Kumar (2011) who notes that activists of the Uttarakhand movement continued with their protests even after the granting of the new State as they found their agendas not accommodated with the new State government.

Another critique addresses the assumption of autonomy movements as representatives of their constituents. Shah's (2012) ethnographic account on the aftermath of the creation of Jharkhand

[13] The heart of Tillin's (2013) analysis concerns the factors that actually led to the creation of new States in 2000. She denies any causal relation between mass mobilisations and the centre's decision to grant new States or autonomy, and instead suggests that movements become part of the political struggle over power at the State and central levels. Defying claims which see the creation of these States as an actual response of the central government to the claims of movements, she contends that the creation of these three States was rather the outcome of short-term electoral considerations of Chief Ministers of the respective mother-States which were preceded and conditioned by social and political changes which had created new patterns of political competition since the 1970s, i.e. the rise of caste-based politics or the BJP's support for regional movements.

points to the lack of representation *within* movements. She shows that statehood had very different meanings for different sections of society (see also Corbridge 2002). While better-off adivasis[14] and higher castes anticipated benefits from autonomy, other adivasis did not seem to show much interest in the change of governance. Instead of seeing their aspirations being fulfilled through statehood, many of them turned to the Maoists (Corbridge 2002, Shah 2012). This points at stark discrepancies between well-articulated elite - and less-articulated non-elite - aspirations, and underlines Mawdsley's critical remark that "regional mobilisations, like other social movements, can mask partial and elite interests and manipulation" (Mawdsley 2002, 44). Chima (2009) and Lacina (2014; 2009) emphasise this aspect by pointing at the internal fractures of movements and power-struggles. In the north-east of India this has often led to local autocracies and exacerbated ethnic conflict.

This latter point is stated by Baruah's (2005) study on the effects of autonomy concessions in the North East of India, which is characterised by a mosaic of different ethno-linguist groups. He shows that autonomy concessions on paper do not guarantee a more effective participation of the grassroots. Instead, concessions in form of autonomous councils contributed to an escalation of ethnically based conflicts as these increase the access to resources for an ethnic majority group while tending to exclude ethnic minorities who then demand autonomy for themselves, often violently (Samaddar 2002; Das 2005; van Schendel 2012)[15]. Samaddar (2005) pointedly described such discrepancies between the legal-constitutional promises and principles of "autonomy", and the shortcomings in their factual implementation by a centralised state as a "paradox of autonomy" (ibid. 17).

Also studies on the effects of the 1986 movement and the DGHC in Darjeeling show that instead of facilitating greater participation of the population in regional governance, the autonomy concessions for Darjeeling have instead fostered the establishment of a dominant political elite (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000; Chakrabarty 2005; Benedikter 2009a; Lacina 2009; Sarkar 2012).

Many hold that a combination of occasional claims to statehood, political clientelism, corruption, and repression of rivals (including alleged murders of Ghisingh's challengers) ensured party president Ghisingh the uncontested position at the top of the presidential hierarchy (Chakrabarty 2005; Lacina 2009; Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013). Rival parties (such as the AIGL and the CPRM) were marginalised through exclusion from developmental benefits channelled through the GNLF-

[14] Aborigines

[15] Baruah's (2005) extensive study on Assam also underlines that despite of statehood the central government influences the affairs of the State to a large degree (e.g. in terms of developmental policies or the employment of army and paramilitary forces to fight rebel groups). He calls this "cosmetic federalism" (Baruah 2005, 63 pp).

controlled DGHC (see Chapter 3), and due to a lack of recognition by the government, which increased their inability to seriously challenge the GNLF. The GNLF’s dominance between 1986 and 2007 is reflected in electoral victories of party-supported candidates at district, State and national levels.

In view of these developments, many authors interpret Gorkha ethno-regionalism as a mere *instrument* of elites to gain access to resources. Such an instrumentalist reading of ethnic identity contends that ethnicity is a social and political construct of elites who struggle over access to state resources and control of their communities (Brass 1991). These competing elites use selected cultural characteristics from the groups they claim to represent as political resources in order to ensure and gain political and economic advantages (ibid. 8, 15). The construction of ethnic identity thus serves both as a means for mobilisation, and as an instrument that elites use to formulate demands towards the state. Accordingly, in this reading instrumental party politics is the main driving force behind the regular claims and agitations for Gorkhaland. These become a means for power-hungry regional elites to get autonomy concessions from the government and to stay in power (Lacina 2009; Lacina 2014; Subba 1992; Kaushik 2013; Sarkar 2013; Chettri 2014).

Lacina (2014) who analyses the Gorkhaland agitation in relation to historic political power struggles in Darjeeling, contends:

> Mobilisation for autonomy is primarily a tactic of local political competition. […] Autonomy demands escalated owing to weakening of the hegemonic party […]. When a weakened hegemon makes political space available, challengers immediately demand greater autonomy for Darjeeling. The reliable popular response to such appeals suggests the durability of both the Gorkha identity and the Gorkhaland demand. (ibid. 24)

This critique not only adds an instrumental dimension to the understanding of the Gorkhaland movement by uncovering the roles of regional political elites, it also underlines that autonomy concessions from the central or State governments are not (necessarily) an expression of the government’s readiness to share power with the regions, but might be intended as a means to “convert” (Sarkar 2013, 136) the ethnic movement into local power struggles. This helped the state to repress autonomy demands (Lacina 2009). Ultimately, such practices led to a shrinking of democratic space in Darjeeling (Chakrabarty 2005; Ganguly 2005; Chima 2009; Bagchi 2012; Sarkar 2013; Lacina 2014) (see Chapter 3). These critical accounts point at the conflation of the ethno-regional agenda, the autonomous council and regional power struggles.

Further, such critical evaluations suggest that the repeated attempts of regional parties to present themselves as the sole representative of the statehood demand towards the government indicate their instrumentalisation of the ethno-regional agenda for negotiating their relation to the State and

national government. Leadership over the movement becomes part of the regional political struggle over resources. The establishment of the regional council (DGHC) institutionalised this relation between the government and the regionally ruling party.

Such observations underline that a clear-cut distinction between party-politics, the movement, and the state is not applicable in the Darjeeling case. I will detail these claims in more detail in Chapter 3 through a discussion of the historic evolution of ethno-regionalism in conflation with political parties. I also draw on these critical evaluations to scrutinise the political regime after the GJM gained power in Darjeeling. This includes an analysis of the autonomous council as a means for GJM’s political patronage in Chapter 6, and the utilisation of repression as means for ruling in Chapter 7.

1.2.3 Bridging the gap between parties and movements

I draw on these critical evaluations to better understand the Gorkhaland movement. They underline my proposal to approach movements for new States not as unified blocks, but to account for their internal fractures and composition, and their interrelations with party politics at different levels of the polity. They also express caution in understanding movement leaders’ rhetoric as the voice of those in whose names new States are being demanded, and raise the question of the winners and losers of autonomy movements and concessions. I contend that the decentralisation thesis is insufficient to explain why the statehood agitations in Darjeeling (from 1986-88, and since 2007) were accompanied by the establishment of a dominant party regime.

Drawing on this critique I make two major propositions for the study of statehood movements. First, I suggest shifting attention from studying the effects of autonomy movements in terms of legal autonomy concessions towards analysing such movements’ effects on political practice and regimes in the concerned regions.

Second, I critically review the “movement” character of the Gorkhaland agitation and raise the question of what type of movement it actually is. In line with this, I contend that common approaches to the Gorkhaland agitation as a “social” and/or “ethnic” movement (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Bagchi 2012; Kaushik 2013) account only for the dimensions which are prominently promoted by its leaders and advocates. Such labelling obscures not only the movement’s internal politics and the role of elite interests but also the question of the movements’ bases and organisational structure, the relations between leaders and followers, and its entanglement with regional, state and central politics. I propose that a study of the effects of movements needs to better scrutinise such relations between movements and party-politics. Drawing on approaches that question such relations, I will now critically review the “movement”- character of the Gorkhaland agitation, and the “party” character of the GJM.

For this discussion I draw on existing studies on the movement since the 1980s (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Chakrabarty 2005; Lacina 2009; Sarkar 2013) and on my own observations of the movement since 2007. These are based on newspaper articles, expert interviews and party leaders’ accounts (Chapter 2 will discuss the research methods in detail).

Social movements and parties

The decentralisation thesis tends to understand autonomy movements uncritically as non-party political phenomena which promote a radical break with the functioning of politics, as becomes clear in Kothari’s (1985) interpretation of the grassroots level or non-party-political process. Very often, however, movements for new States are led by regional political parties which initiate, or sometimes emerge from popular agitations. Prominent examples are the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (Jharkhand Liberation Front) for Jharkhand, the *Telugu Desam Party* (Party of the Telugu land) for Telangana, or the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (Drawidian Progress Federation) for Tamil Nadu. Tillin (2011) also mentioned that “non-party popular movements” (ibid. 36) can be hijacked by politicians. But how do political parties and social movements interrelate?

Bebbington (2009) broadly defined social movements as “processes of spatially and temporally diffuse collective action that […] are sustained over time and framed within a shared identity and set of programmatic commitments” (ibid. 8). Oomen (2010) described them as “informed of an ideology to promote change or stability, using any means – violent or non-violent” (ibid. 11). Actors in the movements do not necessarily agree on the same vision but there is a degree of overlap between their goals and concerns. Examples for such social movements are women’s rights movements, environmental movements, caste- or religion-based movements, to name but a few.

Due to the variety of organisations and issues involved, social movements are however not fixed objects, but instead fluid and not easily categorised (Bebbington 2009, 3). To better account for this vagueness some authors suggested to replace the term “social movement” with “contentious politics” to describe collective political struggles directed towards, or involving the state (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008). Leitner et al. (2008) define contentious politics as:

> concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries. (Leitner 2008, 157)

Although the debate on social movements began to question their internal democratic character (della Porta 2013; della Porta and Rucht 2013; Poletta 2002), the above definitions fit to the

decentralisation thesis’ conviction that movements for new States forward popular demands towards the state using the rhetoric of rights, recognition, redistribution and democracy.

In contrast to social movements, political parties invest more into their organisational structure, define membership roles, have a clear division of labour and function along chains of command (Kitschelt 2006). Schlesinger (1985) defined the main aim of parties as “to gain control of the government in the name of the group by winning election to public office” (ibid. 1985). Thus, to advance collective interests parties use the institutional channels of the political system and involve in electoral politics, while social movements concentrate their protest outside of such channels, e.g. through “street politics” (Kitschelt 2006).

Such differences in the definitions of movements and parties do however not imply that the two exist in isolation from each other. The literature on social movements offers an accommodation of political parties into its framework as “social movement organisations” (SMO). This proposal stems from the realisation that networks solely based on shared grievances alone are not sufficient to maintain movement action over a longer period of time (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Movements require financial, human, social and other resources which can only be channelled by organisations, such as NGOs, churches, or parties (Bebbington 2009, 4; Kriesi 1996). These SMOs are “complex, or formal, organisations which identif[y] [their] goals with the preferences of a social movement [...] and attempt[s] to implement those goals” (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1218). Alliances between social movements and parties yield benefits for both: they can increase a party’s ideological credibility, while movements might benefit from the organisational strength of the party. Over time, social movements might even become formalised as parties, or parties might initiate movements (Basu 2001). This underlines that the “dichotomy of the party and non-party politics is somewhat outdated or misleading” (Sangvai 2007, 117). Importantly, the SMO concept acknowledges that such organisations can give rise to conflicts and fractures within a movement: different SMOs representing a social movement may have distinct ideas about the movement discourse and can compete for position within the movement, e.g. by capturing the resource flows (in terms of public support, money etc.) to the movement (ibid. 1219 and 1237; Bebbington 2009, 4). But although an analysis of a movement’s structure along its SMOs is helpful for deciphering its organisational structure and popular bases, the concept alone does not account for the question of what the consequences of political parties’ participation in (or initiation of) movements are.

Also Kothari (1985) regards regional parties which demand autonomy as an element of grassroots movements and “part of a larger democratic struggle” (ibid. 345). But despite of his overtly positive reading of such movements, he also raises the critical question of whether involved parties pave the

way for greater participation or instead "rise on the crest of mass discontent and then ignore them" (Kothari 1985, 346). In Darjeeling, the dominance of the *Morcha* not only raises questions of its ability (and will) to represent other groups of the movement, and the relations of movement leaders to participants. It also raises the more general question of what kind of "movement" the Gorkhaland movement actually is. Following Kothari's warning, I argue that the participation of political parties in a movement does indeed have serious consequences for the course the movement takes, and on its effects on the regional political regime. I propose that one reason for the failure of the revived Gorkhaland movement to initiate substantial change in the Darjeeling political regime is the way it was captured by regional political parties (see Chapter 3).

In literature on statehood movements however, the questions of the social or party-political bases of statehood movements, and the possibly problematic relations between social and party-political realms have been discussed explicitly by very few authors. I discuss these in the following.

*"*Jan andolan*" and party-political movements*

Anup Kumar's (2011) accounts of the social and political bases of the Uttarakhand movement are a useful approach to this question. Kumar distinguishes between a non-party-political movement (*jan andolan*) and a (party-) political movement. Drawing on Kothari's account of the "non-party political process", for Kumar, the qualifier *jan* ("people") describes those who express resistance (or formulate demands) to the state while being opposed to the mainstream political parties. While the *jan andolan* draws on ideology and programmatic appeals, a "political" movement is organised by political parties and involves in electoral politics to make claims on the state. Kumar shows how movement activists, who stemmed from different social movements (such as Chipko, anti-liquor, or anti-dam) themselves enforced this distinction between social and party-political realms by not granting party politicians access to the public spaces of the movement such as the protest committees and thereby avoid their demands being exploited by electoral politics. In other words, activists did not recognise parties as SMOs. Also Baruah (1999, 9) analyses the basis of Assamese sub-nationalism (i.e. the Assam movement from 1979-85) more explicitly. The organisations leading the movement described themselves as "non-political" and saw their concerns of a higher moral order than the imperatives of electoral politics (Baruah 1999, 10).

In Darjeeling, however, the opposite is the case, as the broad public appeal of the statehood demand is channelled exclusively through regional parties. Also, the GJM became a formal political party recognised by the Indian Election Commission in April 2008 (Election Commission India 2008) after it had revived the agitation as a self-proclaimed "organisation of the *jāti*" (see above) in 2007. Besides the GJM, the AIGL, the GNLF and the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM) – a splinter

group of the CPI-M district committee established in 1996 – are also demanding Gorkhaland. The CPRM combines the statehood with a class-agenda. Further, the GNLF-C, a small splinter party of the GNLF[16], and the *Gorkha Rastriya Nirman Morcha* (GRNM) demand statehood[17]. The only non-party political organisation which demands Gorkhaland is the *Bharatiya Gorkha Parisangh* (BGP) which describes itself as a national-level umbrella organisation of all Indian Gorkhas (BGP 2011), including Nepali-speaking Indians living outside Darjeeling. Although the BGP does not have much influence in Darjeeling, it sometimes organises indoor meetings and seminars, or participates in rallies called by the AIGL or the CPRM.

It is important to note that besides the regional parties there are no non-party political organisations (except for the BGP) involved as SMOs in the struggle, and that the movement has been dominated by two parties: the GNLF (from 1986-2007), and its successor the GJM (since 2007/08). The respective dominant party claims to be the sole genuine promoter of Gorkhaland while alleging that other parties were neither capable nor trustworthy advocates (see Chapter 5). Thus, although all the above named regional parties share the same objective – the creation of Gorkhaland – they do not struggle in a united way. In other words, while the "movement" involves all regional parties as SMOs, one of these has attained dominance over the others. This dominance is however contested by rival parties who regularly criticised the *Morcha* for its "monopolisation" of the Gorkhaland claim. For instance, late AIGL president Madan Tamang demanded a "collective leadership" of the agitation by all regional parties, while stressing that the movement was a "people's" and not a party-movement (Tamang 2010, YouTube; see Chapter 8). In this context, the label "party-political movement" adequately describes its internal organisational structure.

Interestingly, most people I spoke to in Darjeeling hardly ever question the fact that it is only political parties (instead of non-party groups) claiming leadership of the movement. Although in the vernacular people distinguished between the "*āndolaṇ"* (movement, agitation for Gorkhaland) and the "party" [Engl.] as an organisation, they saw only political parties responsible for initiating and maintaining the *āndolaṇ.* This underlines the close association of "party" and movement in the public imaginary, too. In fact, public "party" meetings do not usually have a programmatic content, except for aspects closely related to the demand of Gorkhaland. Thus it is hard to tell whether people join processions because they follow the party, or because they want Gorkhaland, or both at the same time.

[16] After the murder of former GNLF rebel leader C.K. Pradhan in 2002 (allegedly sanctioned by Subash Ghisingh) his wife launched the CNLF-C.
[17] These parties are of no further concern to this study due to their small size and lack of political activities.

Dual identities and movement-parties

To further scrutinise the relation between social and party-political realms in the "movement" I now turn to the question of what type of party the GJM is.

Basu's (2001) account on the BJP's "dual tactics", and Kitschelt's (2006) concept of the "movement party" are helpful for conceptualising the identity of the GJM as a party in relation to the movement.

In her study on the BJP, Basu contends that both social-movement- and party-identities are situational registers for electoral mobilisation. Similarly to Kumar (2011), she claims that while a social movement tends to stress beliefs and ideology, and is rather uncompromising about its objectives, a political party attempts to garner votes for electoral success making it more compromising on its principles (Basu 2001, 164). Her analysis of the BJP's dual tactics, however, transcends clear-cut distinctions between movements and parties, and instead shows that a political party can itself combine these two identities: the one of a militant social movement, and the other of a moderate political party. Basu finds that the BJP combines these identities in cyclical and sometimes simultaneous ways. While the movement identity is directed at garnering broad public support – which she sees exemplified in the march to Ayodya[18] – the party tactics attempted to represent the BJP as a responsible political party once it was elected into government. Basu sees the reason for these "dialectics" (ibid. 163) in the fact that "by emphasising one identity the BJP has encountered certain problems which it has sought to address by highlighting the other identity" (ibid.).

Also the GJM espouses such "dialectics". It is not only (and openly) involved in electoral politics; it also draws strongly on the ethno-regional programme as a source of legitimacy, which puts it into direct opposition towards the State government. The GJM led a forceful agitation for Gorkhaland between 2007 and 2012 which included mass-demonstrations, regular general strikes (*bandhs*) in the three hill-subdivisions, hunger-strikes, tax-boycotts and *gheraus* of government offices. As I will show in Chapter 5, public turnout at these events was huge and included all sections of society (including tea plantation labourers, state employees, and intellectuals. At the same time, while promoting a radical programmatic agenda directed against the State, the GJM was also involved in negotiations with the State and central government that eventually led to the agreement on the new autonomous council, the GTA, in 2011. Thus, while the GJM adopted a confrontational stance towards the

[18] In 1992, the BJP and its affiliated *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (a radical-nationalist Hindu organisation) had mobilised thousands of supporters to occupy the site of the 16th century *Babri Masjit* in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, which they claimed stood on the historical birthplace of God Ram. Following a political rally, the *Masjit* was completely destroyed, and several hundred people died in the subsequent clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

government during the agitation, the GTA agreement signifies an accommodative and less radical approach.

Whenever the situation demands it, however, the GJM is ready to mobilise its supporters for new protest programmes, such as happened in August 2013: In the end of July 2013 the central government in Delhi had announced the creation of a new Telangana State. In reaction, GJM president Bimal Gurung resigned from his post as GTA chief and the *Morcha* mobilised thousands of followers to participate in a month-long *bandh* to press for the creation of Gorkhaland (*The Hindu,* 29.7.2013; *TT*, 31.7.2013). Confronted with paramilitary forces sent by the State government and with the arrest of hundreds of its activists (including elected GTA councillors), however, the *Morcha* decided to switch back into its accommodative party modus and continued to rule through the GTA (*The Hindu,* 27.12.2013)[19]. This suggests that the party oscillates between a radical movement and an accommodative political party identity.

Kitschelt (2006) too transcends clear-cut distinctions between movements and parties through his concept of "movement parties", which he defines as "coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organisational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competitions" (ibid. 280). According to him, they differ from formal political parties in that they invest little in the formal party structure, lack a formal definition of membership and staff of paid professionals, do not invest into an institutionalised system of aggregating interests, and combine their activities in the arena of formal politics with extra-institutional mobilisation (ibid.).

The GJM demonstrates similar characteristics. Like a political party, it is hierarchically organised and its branches from the local and intermediary to the top levels are connected via chains of command (see Chapter 6). Like a movement however, the party lacks any formal membership (in fact a top-level party leader could not answer my question as to how many members the party had, as there were no central registers). Many individuals affiliate themselves to the GJM through one of its frontal organisations, which include the female (*Nari Morcha*) or the youth *(Yuva Morcha*) wings, or labour unions among others[20]. Unlike more formally organised parties, the GJM does not call annual party

[19] After the agitation failed and the GTA's and GJM's stability was crippled by the arrests of elected councillors and higher-ranking party-leaders, Gurung made a u-turn and again took oath as the GTA chairman in December 2013.

[20] These are the: Gorkha Primary Teachers Organisation, Janmukti Secondary Teachers Organisation, Unemployed Primary Trained/Untrained Teachers Association, Voluntary Higher Teachers Association, Janmukti Voluntary/Para Primary Teachers Organisation, Sishu Sikchha Kendra (MSK), Madhyamic Sikchha Kendra (MMK), Janmukti Insecured Secondary Teachers Organisation, Gorkha Janmukti Vidhyarthi Morcha (students), Gorkha Janmukti Yuva Morcha (youth), Gorkha Janmukti Nari Morcha (women), Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union, Janmukti Karmachari Sangathan (administrative employees), Janmukti

assemblies of elected representatives. Instead, the senior leadership (i.e. president and 17-strong core committee) occasionally call meetings of the party’s central committee, which (in 2012) consisted of 86 members nominated by the president. The intermediary leaders are also largely nominated by the president instead of being elected, a procedure which partly reflects the spontaneous coming-to-power of the organisation (see Chapter 5) but also ensures the inner-party authority of the president (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, the lack of formal opinion-forming mechanisms such as party assemblies and intra-party elections, and the *Morcha*’s alleged exclusion of other regional parties in their agitation raise questions about its representative function.

Both Kitschelt’s and Basus’ elaborations suggest that a clear distinction between movement and party is less helpful when studying political performances and certain forms of political power struggles. Movement and party identities provide distinct registers of political mobilisation; the boundaries between the two are blurred. Seeing the Gorkhaland movement as a party-political movement, and the GJM as a movement-party suggests that an analysis of the statehood movement through the prism of party-political contestations might reveal insights into the reasons for the GJM’s dominance and contributes to solving the puzzle of the acceptance of such a regime by those involved in a movement for justice and rights.

1.3 Competitive authoritarianism and strategies for ruling

So far, I have described the political regime in Darjeeling as dominated by a regional political party (GJM), which claims leadership of the statehood movement while other regional parties (i.e. AIGL, CPRM) which – albeit promoting the same ethno-regional agenda – have not succeeded in garnering greater public support, or gaining recognition as a negotiation partner by the government. The GJM’s authority is expressed not only in its huge electoral victories (see Table 1) or its seeming omnipresence through spatial markers such as flags or posters all over Darjeeling hills, but also through its recognition by the government as the sole representative of Darjeeling’s people. Beyond that, I also outlined that many people blame the GJM for ruling through a combination of corruption, clientelism, and repression of rivals.

In comparative politics such a political set-up is referred to as a “dominant-party” (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010) or a “competitive authoritarian” (Levitsky and Way 2002) regime. These are

Ashayee Karmachari Sangathan (unregular employed), Janmukti Unorganised Sector Labour Union, Bharatiya Gorkha Purba/Ardha Sainik Morcha (soldiers), Janmukti Hotel Owners Association, Minority Community, Siliguri-Terai Chalak Mahasangh (drivers), Joint Action Committee-Transport (Source: document provided by GJM in July 2012)

characterised by the existence of democratic institutions such as elections, parliaments or the media. But although these institutions are "widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority" (Levitsky and Way 2002, 52), incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes systematically and regularly violate such rules and institutions in order to maintain their dominant position. Such disturbances can include the changing of electoral rules, buying of votes, intimidation of opposition and media, or other disadvantaging techniques which make it nearly impossible for opposition forces to win (ibid.). In other words, incumbents regularly breach the principles of substantial democracy (in contrast to procedural democracy) such as equality, participation and freedom of expression (Rubongoya 2007) in order to stay in power. I begin the discussion with a more general outline of the concept of political authority and then display how studies of authoritarian regimes grounded in comparative politics approach the question of how rulers in authoritarian regimes attempt to maintain their authority.

1.3.1 Authority, strategies for ruling and critical junctures

Rulers can only rule as long as they are recognised and accepted by their respective subjects and followers (Weber 1972; Gerschewski et al. 2012). Political authority evolves from this two-sided relation between rulers and ruled. Following Weber (1972), I understand "authority" as the claim to obedience from the ruled, expressed through the unconstrained and unquestionable acceptance of hierarchy (Straßenberger 2013) from the side of the ruled. Whether attempts to gain authority are successful depends on the obedience, acceptance, and/or compliance of the ruled. Thus any analysis of authority must not only account for strategies for ruling, but also for the ways in which such attempts are experienced and perceived, adhered to or resisted. Such an understanding acknowledges that strategies for ruling shape the relations between rulers and the ruled, including both elites and other layers of society. Drawing on these insights, I understand authority here as a relative and procedural outcome of a relationship between those who seek to rule, and those *over whom* they seek to rule. Like legitimacy (see below), it is not a fixed property of rulers, but an outcome of negotiations and contestations[21].

Studies based in comparative politics have developed a range of explanations to study the creation or maintenance of authority in authoritarian regimes. At the centre of these studies stand concerns about the regimes' rise, survival and demise, often centring on the question of how authoritarian rulers manage to stay in power despite of regular violations of democratic standards and human rights. This not only includes the question of why people vote for authoritarian rulers, but also which

[21] This study is only concerned with political authority and not with other forms such as intellectual/scientific or religious authority.

strategies these use to stay in power and to meet challenges to their rule (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Greene 2010; Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013; Gerschewski 2014).

Following the arguments from comparative politics, although democratic rules and procedures are regularly disturbed in competitive authoritarian regimes, the general existence of democratic institutions such as parliaments, judiciary, or media provide meeting platforms for the opposition and thereby pose challenges to the incumbents. Such challenges are exacerbated by incumbents' lack of knowledge about the real support of their regime (what Wintrobe (2009) has described as "dictators' dilemma"), or – in more technical terms – the gap between public needs and governmental programmes. Literature on authoritarian and competitive authoritarian regimes has identified a range of strategies which rulers employ to meet such challenges and establish their authority. Amongst these are the co-optation of elites and/or rivals, and repression (Greene 2007; Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Studies also mention the role of economic performance or ideology as means to legitimise authoritarian rule (Schmidt 2012; Croissant and Wurster 2013; Gerschewski 2014).

Repression

One prominent strategy incumbents in authoritarian regimes can use to meet challenges to their authority is repression. Repression refers to the threat or actual use of sanctions against individuals or organisations (Davenport 2007, 2). It can take two forms: "hard repression" (Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013) or "high intensity coercion" (Way and Levitsky 2006) refers to highly visible acts of violence or abuse such as the use of the violent suppression of democratic institutions or targeted assassinations of well-known opposition leaders (ibid.); it usually involves physical violence (Gerschewski et al. 2012) and "poses an immediate existential threat to individual well-being" (Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013, 119). "Soft repression" (Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013) (or "low intensity coercion", Way and Levitsky 2006)[22] – which is more common – describes more subtle forms which increase the cost of joining the opposition. Although "soft repression" is less visible, it is often highly systematic (ibid.). It includes manipulation, "legal" means to undermine opposition activities (e.g. tax raids on rivals' offices), limitations of civil liberties or other techniques that increase the cost of joining the opposition. One of these is the clientelist distribution of benefits (e.g. government jobs or contracts) according to the principle of reward and punishment (Greene 2010; Way and Levitsky 2006, 392). This technique is closely related to the second strategy incumbents use to maintain their power: co-optation and political patronage. I discuss the use of soft and hard repression through the GJM in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

[22] In my opinion the term "low intensity" is misleading, as soft repression can also be very "intense" from the standpoint of the victims (see Chapter 6 and 7).

Co-optation and patronage

Co-optation refers to the rulers’ sharing of privileges and power with a selected elite or opposition members in return for their loyalty, support, or obedience. It is targeted at elites whose support is regarded important for regime sustenance (such as military or business people) (Brownlee 2002; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Wintrobe 2009; Gerschewski et al. 2012; Schmidt 2012). Guided by the principle of benefit maximisation, this “winning coalition” (Burnell 2006, 553) pledges loyalty and support to the ruler. Co-optation is exercised through both formal (parties, parliaments, elections) and informal institutions in form of personal relationships, clan-based relations and patronage (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Collins 2009; Lust 2009; Gerschewski et al. 2012). The latter refers to a hierarchical and reciprocal exchange relationship in which a client provides services such as work, loyalty or time in return for a patron’s protection or services (Piliavsky 2014b, 5). While most studies regard patronage as a means of co-opting elites, I will show in Chapter 6 that political patronage is in itself an important means for tying the larger population to a ruler/party.

As mentioned above, patronage or clientelism does not only function as a means of rewarding loyal supporters, but also as a means of punishing perceived rivals. In his study of the dominant party regime in Mexico for instance, Greene (2007) showed how the ruling party via its control over public resources excluded rivals from accessing these by distributing public sector jobs or state contracts solely to supporters. The resulting resource asymmetries result in the victimisation of rivals, as it is unlikely for people hoping for or depending on the incumbents’ patronage to join opposition forces (except for ideological reasons). In this way, co-optation and patronage help the ruling party to maintain its “mobilising” and “bargaining” functions (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010), the latter referring to its ability to strike deals with elites, and the former to the capacity to distribute valued goods in return for political support. I will utilise and detail the concept of patronage as reward and punishment strategy in Chapter 6, in which I show how it helps the GJM to silence dissent and to undermine opposition activities while maintaining the loyalty of elites.

Greene (2007, 46) contends that patronage is such a powerful advantage that it even allows incumbents to edge away from their political programmes. This last insight suggests that patronage can compensate for a ruler’s deviations from his ideology, or programmatic incoherence. But how important are the ideological or programmatic appeals of dominant parties (such as the appeal to Gorkhaland) in sustaining their authority beyond material and instrumental interests?

Legitimacy[23]

Although many authors acknowledge the importance of co-optation and repression, most of them claim that these alone are not sufficient and too costly to sustain autocracies. Rather, rulers also have to convince their populations of the rightfulness or legitimacy of their rule (Weber 1972; Burnell 2006; Gerschewski et al. 2012; Croissant and Wurster 2013; Kailitz 2013). Instead of only targeting the ruled with patronage/benefits, authoritarian rulers have an interest in "stocking" support amongst the population (Schmidt 2012). Greene (2007) also noted that even the elites are not attracted to a party by instrumental benefits alone, but also due to their belief in the partisan cause the party espouses (ibid. 120). This "moral authority" is expressed in programmatic or ideological beliefs, and can be attained, for example, through cumulative years of activism, commitment to a cause, or maintaining links to the party's core constituency (ibid. 60).

However, legitimacy exceeds such programmatic appeals. The considerations of the historian Karateke (2005) are a helpful complement to the description on legitimacy I outlined above, and to understand legitimacy as a more general quality of the relation between rulers and ruled. Karateke distinguishes between a "demand" side, which describes the public's expectations of a ruler, and a "supply" side regarding the ways in which rulers attempt to shape and live up to such public expectations. A ruler's legitimacy emerges from the level of coherence between the supply and demand sides[24].

Karateke further distinguishes between two different bases of legitimacy: factual and normative legitimacy. Normative legitimacy (also "diffuse system support", Easton 1965) is based on external sources such as political ideologies, legal, nationalistic or religious claims; shared historical events; traditional norms and values; or a leader's charisma (Karateke 2005; Gerschewski et al. 2012; Croissant and Wurster 2013). Also, people's commitment to an ethno-regional agenda can provide a basis for such diffuse support for a system. While normative legitimacy involves the general and longer-term attitudes of the ruled towards the system, factual legitimacy (also "specific system support", Easton 1965, "output-legitimacy", Schmidt 2012, or "performance legitimacy", Burnell 2006; Pepinsky 2007; Croissant and Wurster 2013) depends on the successful satisfaction of the population's short-term expectations through the performance and output of the political system. Schmidt (2012) defines it as a belief in legitimacy based on factual recognition of the political products and results of a ruler. Such products can include public goods (Croissant and Wurster 2013),

[23] Parts of this section have already been published in a similar form in Wenner (2014).
[24] Although most authors concerned with legitimacy acknowledge Weber's (1972) understanding of it as a form of voluntary belief they transcend his classic three-fold classification of legitimate bases of authority (traditional, bureaucratic, charismatic) (Stillman 1974; Beetham 2001; Greene 2007; Dogan 2009; Croissant and Wurster 2013).

socio-economic attainments (Gerschewski et al. 2012), or the “fulfilment of societal needs and desires such as material welfare and personal security” (Burnell 2006, 549). There are different ways to achieve factual legitimacy. Besides increasing spending before elections (Pepinsky 2007), or effective social and economic policy to increase the supply of public goods and lower unemployment rates (Burnell 2006; Schmidt 2012), the dispensation of patronage through patron-client networks can also increase/underline people’s belief in the rightfulness of an authority (Brownlee 2002; Burnell 2006; Rubongoya 2007; Wenner 2014). Thus co-optation and patronage can also serve as a legitimating strategy for incumbents.

Karateke’s approach to legitimacy as deriving from the relation between supply and demand sides is helpful for this study, as it pays equal attention to public expectations of the rulers/regime and the need for the rulers to live up to these expectations and to deliver. It helps to understand legitimacy as a dynamic, contested and negotiated process rather than a stable property of rulers. The demand side, or public expectations and evaluations of a rulers’ normative bases and factual deliveries, is framed by socially and culturally shaped moral beliefs and values. These are not uniform in a society but “debated, agreed upon or rejected within processes of social competition and/or conflict” (Alfonso, Kennedy, and Escalona 2004, 53:xii). In her study on the legitimating bases of “big men” in Ghana, Lentz (1998) framed these differing expectations and evaluations as “moral communities” (ibid. 62) which evaluate the legitimacy of a leader based on different parameters. Burnell (2006) and Hardin (2009) call for attention to be paid to different perceptions and evaluations of legitimacy in any one society. Karateke’s framework is also useful to analyse legitimacy in the Darjeeling context where elections to district and local institutions have not been held since 2001, and leaders must base their legitimacy on other than the legal-formal mechanism of elections.

Institutions, critical junctures and succession

The brief discussion of the set of strategies for autocratic rule provided some insights into how incumbents attempt to maintain their authority. I now discuss the more general question of how such strategies contribute to a stabilisation of the political regime. Gerschewski et al. (2012) and Gerschewski (2014) designed a three-pillar model of authoritarian rule, which views the three sets of strategies discussed so far (co-optation, repression, legitimacy) in the round. The authors regard the pillars as complementary and reciprocal. The latter means that they can reinforce each other through functional interdependence and mutual strengthening. This can be illustrated along the pillars of legitimacy and co-optation: Gerschewski (2014) argues that legitimation and ideology make it easier for an incumbent to persuade the elite and thus help to reduce co-optation costs; on the other hand, the co-optation of elites decreases the risks of another leader coming up who promotes another possibly appealing ideology. This strengthens the legitimacy of the incumbent (ibid. 28). The authors

suggest that short-term declines in one of these three pillars can be compensated by investing in the other two. For example, when an economic crisis diminishes incumbents' ability to distribute public goods, they can instead invest in an ideological programme, e.g. ethno-regional autonomy agenda, to increase their normative legitimacy; or when rival parties detect a decline in rulers' commitment to certain programmatic policies which affects their legitimacy, the rulers can use repression.

In explaining the long-term stability and demise of authoritarian regimes, and to conceptually link agency-based and structure-focused approaches to explain regime stability, Gerschewksi et al. (2012) draw on historical institutionalism as a variant of neo-institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996; Immergut 1998)[25]. They argue that the regime-sustaining pillars (co-optation, legitimacy, repression) are not givens, but merely develop and stabilise over time. They are underpinned by institutions (understood as formal and informal rules and norms) that structure and regulate the interactions between rulers and the ruled (ibid. 8). A regime is regarded as being more stable when the established rules and norms cater to the interests, preferences and motives of the ruled. This implies that only when the ruled positively respond and adhere to rulers' strategies are these pillars reinforced and stabilised (ibid. 25).

The authors use the same institutional theory to explain regime change. If one or more of the strategies embodied in the three pillars fail over the longer term, this can – in conjunction with other social or political developments – lead to a "critical juncture" (ibid. 3; see also: Capoccia and Kelemen 2011) entailing the possible fall or demise of a regime and/or its ruler(s). According to this model, the GNLF was ultimately unable to sustain its rule, as it lost control of each of the three pillars. Bimal Gurung's establishment of the GJM and his successful overthrow of Ghisingh and the GNLF can be understood as one such critical juncture (this will be detailed in Chapters 3 and 5). Such succession does not, however, necessarily entail a change of the regime's form per se (Brownlee 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002). Although the overthrow of the GNLF did raise hopes for a general regime change in Darjeeling, the continuation of the dominant-party politics suggest that only the regime's master had changed.

In contrast to Gerschewksi et al. (2012) I contend that my question about the *acceptance* of authoritarian regimes and about political practice and perceptions is best approached through a constructivist approach focussing on actors and their agencies. In doing so, I follow Giddens' (1984) who argued that structures in form of institutions (rules, laws, socially agreed terms of behaviour) stand in a reciprocal relationship to agency and practices. By acting according to certain rules, actors

[25] Neo-institutional approaches research the role that institutions play in determining social and political outcomes (Hall and Taylor 1996). Alongside historical institutionalism, rational choice and sociological institutionalism are also considered branches of this diverse field (ibid.).

reproduce them. In turn, their actions are influenced and shaped by these structures. If a majority of actors refuse to act according to such rules or lose their trust in the expected outcomes of certain actions, this can lead to institutional - and ultimately regime - change. I provide further details of this agency-structure approach in the following section.

The theories to understanding competitive authoritarian regimes and the three-pillar model outlined above provide a valuable element of the framework for studying the situation in Darjeeling. In the language of competitive authoritarianism, this study is thus concerned with the question of why the overthrow of an authoritarian party (GNLF) was not accompanied by a general regime change, despite the broad public awareness about rights and aspirations for justice expressed in the idiom of *sachet jantā* and the demand for statehood.

1.3.2 Shortcomings and anthropological approaches

The theoretical approaches I have reviewed, all revolving around the three pillars of authoritarian rule, are useful for gaining a conceptual understanding of the strategies employed by incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes to maintain their authority. The theories have certain shortcomings, however, regarding their ability to explain the *quality* of the relation between rulers and the ruled, and the basis for the ruled’s compliance with a regime.

Most of the above reviewed studies draw on national level data and generate findings based on large-N quantitative surveys and mathematic models. This positivist methodological approach using quantitative modelling distracts attention from the concrete interactions between rulers and ruled at smaller scales. Further, this nationwide focus ignores possible deviations from national democratic regimes on the sub-national level, and the ways such exceptional spaces co-exist with national democratic regimes. Another shortcoming is the assumption of benefit-maximising populations as a stable part of their models. Studies on voting behaviour in competitive authoritarian regimes usually identify voters’ expectations of benefiting from political patronage as the main driving force behind their electoral choice, and see ideologically driven voting behaviour as a secondary phenomenon (Blaydes 2006; Greene 2007; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; for India see: Chandra 2003; Vaishnav 2012). Although such transactional considerations do certainly play an important role in voting behaviour, I contend that it would be wrong to reduce voters solely to benefit-maximising subjects.

Gerschewksi et al. (2012) identify three motives for the ruled to accept or support an authoritarian regime: they regard it as rightful; they benefit from co-optation; or they fear sanctions. Each of the three pillars corresponds to one of the motives: legitimacy is based on the belief in the regime’s rightfulness, co-optation draws on the benefit-maximising actor, and repression is based on the fear of sanctions (Gerschewski et al. 2012, 8). Although I generally agree with these motives of the ruled

to comply with or support a regime, they do not answer several important questions. When and under what conditions do the ruled perceive a regime as rightful? What kind of benefits do they regard as pleasing? What kind of sanctions do they fear, and under what conditions? I propose that answers to these questions are not uniform for the group of the ruled, but differ according to factors such as their socio-economic background, their moral values or their differing expectations. These are aspects which are covered in the “demand” side of Karateke’s legitimacy-model (see above). Answering these questions requires an approach which explores the quality of the relations between rulers and the ruled, and which accounts for differing perceptions and evaluations of the rulers by the ruled.

Lust’s (2009) study on electoral behaviour in the Middle East underlines the usefulness of local studies for understanding electoral behaviour in competitive authoritarian regimes beyond simplifying transactional models. Using qualitative research methods, she shows that expectations that candidates will distribute patronage are not only based on benefit-maximising motives, but are equally embedded in social norms related to membership of family, tribe, neighbourhood or villages. This underlines the context-specific nature of regime support. Also Gerschewski et al. (2012) demand a stronger focus on the role of the population for the sustenance or decline of autocracies, and Gerschewski (2014) himself acknowledges the need of qualitative studies to assess the three pillars of legitimacy, repression and co-optation.

An understanding of the acceptance of or compliance with a regime therefore requires an epistemological and methodological approach that accounts for individuals’ life-worlds and perceptions as framed by specific historical, cultural and socio-economic structures. Drawing on the above introduced conceptualisation of political authority as deriving from the relations between rulers and the ruled, the success or failure of rulers’ attempts to stabilise their authority and gain legitimacy is an outcome of this relation. In this perspective, the longevity of a regime can only be explained by viewing strategies for ruling in relation to their specific perceptions amongst those over whom authority is sought.

An approach grounded in qualitative research and the constructivist paradigm helps to account for these aspects. It helps to derive an understanding of the localised everyday processes, in which individuals make sense of their life-worlds as embedded in historical, social, cultural and economic structures and processes (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011). This includes not only accounting for emic views and calling generalisations (such as “movement”, “party”) into question. It also demands attention to symbolic-cultural and local expressions and configurations of “politics” (Kubik 2009). I will provide a detailed account on the methodological and epistemological approach of this study in Chapter 2.

Anthropological approaches to the study of politics in South Asia that look at public evaluations of leaders and the bases for such evaluations in relation to the ruled’s specific contexts and their subjectivities as social and political persons account for these aspects. Their local and qualitative focus allows to put the existence of rights-seeking and “aware” persons (or *sachet jantā*) into relation to the dominant party-regime and thereby to link the understanding of political structures to the regularities of human behaviour (cf. Giddens and Sutton 2009). The approaches I used here account for the empirical data generated during this study. More explicitly, these concern: (i) the construction of ethno-regionalism – in my case with particular relation to geographical space (Smith 1996a; Smith 1996b; Reuber 1999; Paasi 2002a); (ii) the role of leadership, reputation, and reputation management (Bailey 1971; Mines and Gourishankar 1990; Alm 2006; Price and Ruud 2010a); (iii) patronage and clientelism (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2003; Chandra 2003; Véron et al. 2003; Piliavsky 2014a); and (iv) hard repression, i.e. the “functional utility” and performance of violence (Brass 1997; Hansen 2001; Gorringe 2006a;). I will detail each of these approaches in the consecutive chapters of this thesis.

I will show how these strategies, together with their respective response amongst the ruled, contribute to the three pillars of repression, co-optation and legitimacy. I contend that the combination of comparative politics with anthropological approaches will contribute to a better understanding of the durability of authoritarian regimes. The latter supplements the formers’ largely quantitative approach with insights from local field studies, which help understanding the quality of the relations between rulers and the ruled.

It is important to keep in mind that the three pillars of authoritarian rule are not that clear-cut, and in practice they overlap in their functions and effects (cf. Gerschewski 2014). I already suggested that patronage can be a means of co-optation and repression (see Chapter 6), and – as I will show in Chapter 7 – even hard repression can serve to legitimise an incumbent. In Darjeeling, I argue, the parties’ reference to the imaginative geography of Gorkhaland (Chapter 4), a leaders’ reputation (Chapter 5), patronage/clientelism (Chapter 6) and hard repression (Chapter 7) are all distinct strategies through which incumbents attempt to attain legitimacy and maintain authority expressed in their leadership over the statehood movement.

1.3.3 Activists, followers and rivals

I will attempt to analyse the construction of political authority as evolving from the relations between rulers and the ruled. Before approaching this relation however it is necessary to clarify who the “rulers” and the “ruled” are in Darjeeling, and how I use these terms in this study. While it is relatively easy to identify the “rulers” as the leaders of political parties and persons commonly

referred to as *netā* in the vernacular (see Chapter 5), the question of the "ruled" requires greater differentiation. Based on the empirical data generated during this study I propose following distinction to account for different groups of the ruled: (i) activists, (ii) followers/constituents, and (iii) rivals. Importantly, various interviews with the "ruled" expressed the view that "one has to have a party". Thus it is hard to find "neutral" persons in Darjeeling.

I use the term "activist" to describe all those who are called *kāryakartā* in the vernacular, i.e. party activists or party-workers who are actively involved with the political parties and invest time and money into the political work. Such work comprises organising local level meetings, mobilising support for party events, or mediating between the administration and the population (Banerjee 2011). I distinguish between activists as *active* party supporters and *passive* "followers" (or constituents). The term follower might be misleading and should not be confused with active support. Rather, my study characterises followers as those not actively *resisting* the ruling party. As "non-activists" they only sometimes or never take part in party activities. Although the party might regard them as members (usually because they placed a party-flag on their house, or occasionally participate in rallies) they do not necessarily willingly support a certain party. As I will show in this study, by virtue of their power over resources or through intimidation the ruling party often "traps" them into support (cf. Magaloni 2006) which becomes visible in their electoral support as constituents. Followers' membership is vague, underlining the movement-character of the GJM (cf. Kitschelt 2006). While many studies on comparative authoritarianism stress the role of elites in sustaining an incumbents' rule (see critique in Gerschewksi et al. 2012), here I contend that this group of "followers" plays at least an equally important role in stabilising a regime, as they provide a potent base for party-political mobilisation. In this thesis, I call both activists and followers "supporters" of a party when they do not actively resist its orders. Like Gerschewski et al. (2012), I assume that activists' and followers' motivations to support a party/leader can be based on both, transactional (when expecting some material benefits) or moral grounds (following a leader because he claims to promote a programmatic cause) (see also Bailey 1969) but it can also stem from fear and obligation. I call those, who openly oppose the ruling party (e.g. by joining an opposition group) "rivals" or opposition-members.

1.4 Living in Darjeeling

Before utilising the analytical concepts outlined above to study political authority in Darjeeling in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I will provide more detailed information on the specific socio-economic context of the "ruled" and "rulers". This serves as a background for understanding their accounts on the movement, political leaders/supporters/rivals and parties in the subsequent chapters. After giving a brief overview of Darjeeling's demography, economy and development, I will

turn to the tea plantations. Although this study has a multi-sited methodological focus (see Chapter 2) including various places of political performance (such as public meetings, party-offices, urban areas) tea plantations were a major field site for this study. Plantation residents provide a major constituent group for political parties and were therefore chosen as important group representing the “ruled” for this study. Due to time constraints I did not include agricultural (or *bastī*) areas in this study.

1.4.1 Economy and development

The three Darjeeling hill sub-divisions have a total population of 872,839 (including the four municipalities of Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Mirik), of which 643,976 are classified as rural (data provided by Darjeeling District Magistrate (DM) based on the 2011 Census). As mentioned above, Darjeeling’s economic mainstay is tea, which is a major employer of the population in Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions. In 2013, there were 87 tea plantations in Darjeeling, employing about 57,000 persons permanently and 13,000 seasonally (*Business Standard,* 1.9.2013). Both the number of estates and of employees used to be higher, but since the 1970s changes in national business policy and world market conditions have resulted in the closure of many estates (Besky 2013, 14) and forced people to search for alternative employment. While the tea economy is concentrated in Darjeeling and Kurseong subdivisions, agriculture plays a bigger role in Kalimpong sub-division.

Other rural income sources are timber or cinchona cultivation, the latter of which is also done on plantations. Besides tea, tourism is the other major economic pillar. It is largely confined to a few spots (Subba 1992) including the municipal areas of Darjeeling and Mirik. In urban areas, business (such as retail, tourism, construction or public contract works) and education are important sources of income. Educational institutions, many of which have survived from the colonial era, entice pupils from all over India and neighbouring countries to come to Darjeeling. Not surprisingly, many young persons in Darjeeling hold a degree but leave the district in search for adequate employment in the cities in the plains, underlining the problem of “educated unemployment” (Chettri 2014, 134). Many retired servicemen live with their families in the town areas.

Town-dwellers’ reliance on business and tourism makes them especially vulnerable to prolonged strikes such as those regularly called as part of the statehood agitation since late 2007. For instance, the number of tourists declined from 495,000 in 2008/09 to 145,000 in 2010/11, and only increased to 757,000 in 2013 after the GTA agreement promised more peace in the region (*Business Standard,* 1.9.2013). Various accounts hold that especially socio-economically weaker sections such as daily wage labourers were forced to pawn or sell their assets such as gold in order to afford the stocking of

food for phases of prolonged strikes. Besides regular power-cuts, the lack of adequate water supply is one of the main issues of concern in the towns, particularly in Kalimpong and Darjeeling (Joshi 2014)[26]. In conversations, Darjeeling town-dwellers also often criticised the congestion and the dirt in the town, along with the perceived illegal acquisitions of public land for private enterprises.

Although leaders of the regional parties criticise a lack of development in the hill region, developmental indicators suggest that Darjeeling is relatively well-off compared to the rest of West Bengal and the wider country. The West Bengal Human Development Report in 2004 (Government of West Bengal 2004)[27] ranked Darjeeling district fourth in West Bengal after Kolkata and its urban surrounding areas (Haora, North 24 Paragans) with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.65 (the West Bengal average was 0.61). This is higher than the national HDI of 0.461 at that time (UNDP 2011). In terms of gender equality, Darjeeling ranks as high as second behind Kolkata (Government of West Bengal 2004). Although there are certainly discrepancies between the plains which benefit from the Siliguri business hub and the rural dominated hills (Chettri 2014), Darjeeling district is better-off than other economically deprived districts in West Bengal.

1.4.2 Demography: Gorkhas, Nepalis and others

Today, most of the population in the three hill sub-divisions is Nepali-speaking, in contrast to the West Bengal plains where Bangla is the dominant language. This distinct demography of the region is largely an outcome of its historically contested boundaries and of the British colonial era, which included the establishment of a Hill Station in Darjeeling in 1835 (see Chapter 3). After the East India Company had acquired the sparsely inhabited region, their attempts to build infrastructure, the introduction of tea cultivation, as well as the opening of an army recruitment centre enticed thousands of persons from East Nepal who soon outnumbered the indigenous Lepcha-population (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000). Those who joined the British army were called “Gurkhas” by the British, an anglicised reference to their origin in the expanding Kingdom of Nepal led by emperors from the previous Gorkha Kingdom[28]. Although these migrants stemmed from different ethnic groups such as Gurung, Tamang, Mangar, Rai or Limbu, with different languages, they began to adopt

[26] Various promised water-supply projects either failed or have been delayed for years. While poorer people have to queue to fill their buckets with water from public taps – as they cannot pay the high bribes to plumbers and municipal officers – the pipes of the municipal supply systems are often leaky. Joshi’s (2014) insightful study discusses the water crisis in the context of local politics with emphasis on the role of women.

[27] The report is based on the 2001 Census.

[28] Gorkha is also the name of the district in Nepal from where in the 18th-century Gorkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah started to conquer the territories that constitute present-day Nepal. There are different theories about the origin of the word Gorkha. Tucci claimed that the Nepalese Gorkhas placed themselves under the protection of the ascetic Goraksa who lived in a mountain cave and worked miracles (cited in: Subba 1992, 54). Probably a member of the Gorakhnath sect which was spreading across northern India in the 14th and 15th centuries had settled there (ibid.), and his idol was installed in Gorkha (Samanta 2000, 8).

Nepali – which was at that time made the official language of Nepal – as a *lingua franca*. Around the beginning of the 20th century, coupled with this process and the emergence of Nepalese literature, a shared identity as "Gorkha" began to evolve. This process also contributed to an decoupling of traditional caste relations (Subba 1992). This history of migration and appropriation of the Darjeeling hills is much contested and a highly political issue (Middleton 2013c). In Chapter 4 I show that many Gorkha politicians in Darjeeling stress a primordial relation of the Nepalis to the land and deny their migration during the British time. This is because they believe that historical roots to Nepal contribute to what they call an "identity crisis", perceived as a lack of recognition as Indian citizens by the Indian state and other Indians. Following Subash Ghisingh's initial proposition, many people and politicians still believe that only the creation of Gorkhaland can solve this "identity" crisis (see Chapter 4).

Such apprehensions are reflected in the confusion about the terms "Nepali" or "Gorkha" to describe the Nepali-speaking citizens of India. Not only in Darjeeling itself (Subba 1992, 67) but even in studies on the region there is often confusion about what to call them (see contributions in: Subba et al. 2009; Sinha and Subba 2003). While politicians and some intellectuals from Darjeeling prefer the term "Gorkha", social scientists proposed terms such as "Indians of Nepalese Origin" (Sinha 2009), "Indian Nepalis" (Subba 2003), or "Nepali-speaking Indians" (Chettri 2013). Subba (1992, 71) found that some politicians' insistence on using the term "Gorkha" since the 1980s underlines its fairly political connotations[29]. The 2001 Census termed their language "Nepali" and not "Gorkhali" (Census of India 2001a), although the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution also mentions "Gorkhali" or "Gorkha bhasa" as alternatives (Government of India 1992). Interestingly, most people I spoke to in Darjeeling (except for politicians) defied such discussions and used the terms "Gorkha" and "Nepali" interchangeably suggesting that the terminology actually did not make much difference to them (cf. Besky 2013, 18). Accordingly, I use the terms Gorkha and Nepali as synonyms when referring to the Nepali-speaking Indians[30].

In 2001, Nepali-speakers predominate in the three hill-subdivisions of Darjeeling. The Lepcha make up around 2%, and the Bhutia (Tibetan community) 3% of the district population (Census of India 2001). Other non-Nepali groups are Bengalis, Marwaris and Biharis[31]. While according to the

[29] All political parties use the term "Gorkha" for their names, e.g. the "All India Gorkha League" or "Gorkha National Liberation Front". Only the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists does not refer to the ethnic group's identity in its name, underlining its class approach.

[30] The interchangeability of these terms is underlined by the fact that even government documents do not use them uniformly. For instance, the 1988 notification of citizenship reads Gorkha, while the West Bengal official language Act 1961 recognises Nepali as official language in the three Nepali-speakers dominated sub-divisions of Darjeeling district (Subba 1992, 70).

[31] According to the 2001 census, there are 31,210 Lepcha in Darjeeling district and 45,014 Bhutia (Census of India 2001b).

language census there are about 2.8 million “Nepali”-speakers all over India (Census of India 2001a), they have their highest concentration in the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling. Importantly, and contrary to the claim of many Gorkha politicians that *all* residents of Darjeeling hills belonged to the “Gorkhas” (see Chapter 4), some groups defy such claims. For instance, the Lepcha have more recently invested in emphasising their distinct language and culture (see Chapters 4 and 7), and it is doubtful whether the Bhutia or other resident groups such as Biharis or Marwadis – who mostly belong to the business community – regard themselves as “Gorkhas”. Religion-wise, a majority of the hill-population are Hindus (69%). Buddhists are the second largest group (22%). In 2001, about 11 % of the population belonged to Scheduled Tribes, and 6.2 % to Scheduled Castes (data provided by DM Darjeeling) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Population in Darjeeling district hill sub-divisions (Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong) and Siliguri as per census, 2001. Source: Darjeeling DM/Census 2001

	3 hill sub-divisions	**Siliguri sub-division**	**Total**
Total population	790,501	818,581	1,609,172
Scheduled Castes	49,089	209,792	258,881
Scheduled Tribes	85,047	119,120	204,167
Hindu	545,796	691,918	1,237,714
Buddhist	171,434	5,893	177,327
Christian	56,696	42,596	99,232
Muslim	11,952	73,426	85,378

1.4.3 Tea plantations: Class, hierarchies, dependencies

I now turn to a more detailed discussion of tea plantations as a major field site of this study. Tea estates not only play a major role in the district’s economy, Sandeep Mukherjee, spokesperson of the Darjeeling Tea Association (DTA), estimates that 70% of Darjeeling’s population are directly or indirectly dependent on the tea economy (interview, 15.06.2012). Accordingly, residents of the plantations also provide an important mass base for political parties, something that historically made them prone to political contestations (see also Chapter 3) (Sarkar and Lama 1986). As Sandeep Mukherjee put it: “[Tea] gardens are the turf for political parties’ fight” (interview, 15.06.2012).

The following presentation is partly based on secondary literature, and partly on the data largely generated through participant observation and semi-structured interviews during my stays in the tea plantations (see Chapter 2).

The land of the tea plantations is owned by the West Bengal State which leases it out to private companies for long time-spans (around 30 years). While these companies or individual proprietors (*māliks*) usually stay away from Darjeeling, managers supported by a team of assistant managers oversee the operations. Most workers on the plantation are employed for their whole life. When they reach retirement age they usually pass on their employment to another younger family member, or sell it to somebody else. In the high season the companies additionally employ non-permanent workers from the same or surrounding villages. The permanent workers usually spend most of their life on the plantations. The six-day working week gives them hardly any time to travel, and often the transportation fares to the nearby bazaar places or bigger towns exceed their daily earnings. Most plantations permanently employ several hundred workers who receive their salaries fortnightly based on the number of days they worked, and depending on whether they fulfilled the “task” of plucking a certain amount of leaves a day. Since 2011, workers were paid a salary of 90 INR (about 1.33 euros) a day. Permanent employees, however, receive a large part of their salaries in kind. According to law (Indian Plantation Labour Act 1951), companies are also responsible for covering medical expenses, foot rations, money for firewood, for dependents’ children’s primary education, and the expenses of working tools (such as baskets, sickles, gumboots). Some companies provide financial support to workers to construct their houses. A part of the salary goes into a provident fund, which serves as a pension for retired workers. Once a year workers also receive a “bonus” as an incentive for their work[32]. Despite all these in-kind facilities, many workers complained that their wages were too low to sustain their families (compare the minimum wage of 135 INR (2 euros) a day in West Bengal). To prop up the low income from plantation work, households engage in farming on the scarce plots and animal husbandry, or take other odd jobs. Against this backdrop, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) or other governmental welfare schemes provide an important and helpful source of income. Yet, the access to these schemes is confined (see Chapter 6).

Most workers had quite a good understanding of their entitlements and rights towards the management. To enforce their claims, they felt reliant on the labour unions which function as frontal organisations of political parties. The oft-expressed feeling that “one has to have a ‘party’ [Engl.] [read: union]” is related to this perceived dependency. Once a year individual labourers buy a ticket of their respective union at a contribution of around 100 INR which in a way shows their party-affiliation. In 2012 and 2013, in most tea plantations, only the GJM-affiliated union was active, while

[32] The bonus is paid as a percentage of the money a worker has earned during the year (recently 20%).

the CPRM-affiliated union was active in a few gardens, only. Other unions were not active at the studied sites[33].

As the land of the plantation and villages is State owned, there is next to no private land-ownership. Residents’ occupation of the few available plots for agriculture, gardening and firewood collection is usually accepted by the management, but the plots can be cleared at any time as they are on government land to which the company holds the legal entitlement. According to the Indian Plantation Labour Act 1951, only those working on the plantation and their dependants are allowed to live on the plantations, and earlier workers and their families could be evicted if the management cancelled their work contracts. After the rise of labour unions in the 1950s, this practice ceased to be enforced so that today also families without labour relations to the plantation reside on the plantation land. Importantly, the colonial introduction of the tea economy and the resulting migration of workers from Nepal had effects on the relations between land-ownership, land tenure, caste and class. Due to residents’ lack of legal land-ownership certificates and limited access to land for cultivation, land-ownership, class and caste do not have a positive correlation in the tea plantation areas of Darjeeling, unlike in the plains. Instead, Subba (1989, 91) found that higher economic status was more related to the length of settlement and the adaptive capacity of individual migrants including their investment into education (see also: Chatterji 2007, 49).

As I will detail in Chapter 4, many respondents voiced their dissatisfaction with the harsh and hierarchical working conditions, the low salaries, and the limited perspectives for promotions, underlining feelings of insecurity, exploitation, and minor positions in the strict plantation hierarchy. The majority works in tea plucking and maintenance of the bushes (including weeding, cutting the bushes, supplying fertiliser, etc.). Separate groups of men and women (so-called *deks*) are overseen by *kāmdārīs* and *chaprāsīs* who notice work attendance, supervise the tasks and report to the upper management levels (see Picture 1). They are also responsible for implementing orders from the management, which sometimes causes conflict between them and dissatisfied workers. Workers frequently criticised the fact that managers and assistant managers were not chosen from among the local labours but came from “outside” (*bāhira*), which in their views blocked opportunities for qualified locals to attain higher positions. Many also expressed the fear that their plantation might be shut down (or “logged out”), as sometimes happens when companies feel that the profits are too low. Such a closure even led to a suicide of one man at Chongtong tea estate in 2006.

[33] Very often, minority parties’ unions were only represented by a few leaders, but did not have the power to get involved in negotiations with the management. Different unions hardly ever cooperate, thus underlining their party-political orientation.

Picture 1: Women pluck tea on a steep slope while being supervised by *chaprāsīs.* Picture by the author.

Protesting against the plight of the workers in the logged-out plantation, 62-year-old Baburam Dewan hanged himself at one of the tea-weighing stations. In a handwritten “Suicide Note” attached to his body, he blamed the proprietor of the tea plantation for his suicide and asked the administration to punish him as soon as possible. His note ends with “What kind of oppression is it that one person can keep 6,500 individuals hungry? This is the question to the administration.” Although an extreme case, this incidence symbolises the depression and perceived powerlessness of many employed on the plantations.

Village samāj*, unemployment and Gorkhaland*

Against the backdrop of dependency and insecurity about employment and finances, residents of the tea plantation villages formed socially inclusive, informal institutions, known as *samāj* (Nepali for society)[34]. These are comprised of all male and female members from all the village households. The members make a little financial contribution (10-20 INR) to it, generally on a fortnightly basis. The *samājs* are run by village-chosen representatives who take care of finances and call meetings when necessary. All respondents considered the *samāj* to be very important because it provides some degree of social security. It mostly helps members to organise social events (e.g. through providing crockery and chairs for weddings/funerals) and its community-chosen representatives engage in conflict resolution. In all villages, people regarded the *samāj* as non-political and drew a clear line between the social and political realms. Importantly, not all people living on tea plantations are employed in them. Rather, unemployment and labour migration of family members to the plains are

[34] Such *samāj* are in fact also active in agricultural and urban areas.

very common. As I will show, many of these unemployed persons (largely men) are actively engaged with the political parties (cf. Besky 2014, 158). In the following, I draw on accounts by both tea plantation workers and residents, i.e. those not employed in the plantations but living there.

Importantly, I do not treat the village community as a united block, but, according to the aforementioned distinction between “rulers” and the “ruled” and based on the empirical findings of this study, as fractured along the lines of political leaders, party activists, followers and rivals.

In Chapter 4 I will elaborate on how this specific socio-economic context relates to tea plantation residents’ visions of Gorkhaland, and to what extent their aspirations for a redistribution of resources and recognition of their identities as formulated towards the state reflect what I had earlier called an “aware citizenry”.

2 Studying politics: Approaches, methods, and political implications

2.1 Secrecy and warnings

During an interview on Darjeeling politics Niraj Lama, an acclaimed journalist from the region, pointed out: "It was always a 'cloak and dagger'-politics in the hills. [...] There is so much secrecy involved [...]. Even those involved are very much unaware of what is going on in a larger arena" (interview, 14.5.2013). Indeed, my endeavour to uncover power struggles hidden behind the visible and publicly-articulated Gorkhaland agitation met various challenges, amongst which the mentioned "secrecy" was only one. While many politicians I spoke to readily welcomed my interview requests as a chance to portray themselves and their "cause" to an "international audience", many of those not actively engaged with any of the parties often expressed a general refrain to talk about "politics" and "party", claiming that they did not "know" about it, and that they did "not like it".

Further, prior to generating data in Darjeeling I had been warned by one of my supervisors of the possibly violent context, which I was planning to explore. Also, at my first stay in Darjeeling town, Binita*[35], a friend running a small restaurant warned me after I told her about my plans to study "Gorkhaland". With a low voice she urged me: "Miriam, people here are not good. You must be careful, don't ask your questions to everyone". This common association of politics with violence and fear underlined that it was a highly sensitive subject. Also later, many respondents expressed their fear of oppression if criticising those regarded as powerful. Stories of violent oppression and even murders of political rivals allegedly ordered by the ruling party also raised ethical concerns about the security of respondents, and about how I would deal with persons (for example in interviews), who held reputations of using violence against their rivals. Such a context clearly posed challenges to the research process, generation and evaluation of data, and called for an adequate framework and reflection about my own positionality. How could I explore my primary research subject, the construction of political authority, in a context characterised by presumed political "secrecy" and fear from political oppression? Who could I trust? What kind of relationships between me and respondents would be possible in such a context? Was it possible to seek scientific "objectivity" when confronted with cases, which strongly challenged my "European"-shaped moral values? Could I stay "out of politics" when researching politics?

This chapter addresses these questions by reviewing the research process and decisions taken regarding the choice of research paradigm, approach, and methods. After justifying the grounding of

[35] In the following the * behind person- or place-names indicates their anonymisation.

the study in the constructivist paradigm and discussing the implications for data generation, documentation, and interpretation, I introduce multi-sited ethnography as my main approach for data generation. A critique of the approaches and methods is followed by a description of documentation and analysis methods.

2.2 Understanding the meanings of politics

The study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which denies the existence of a pristine reality separate from the researcher. Constructivism assumes that "the meaning of experiences and events are constructed by individuals and, therefore, people construct the realities in which they participate" (Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa 2012, 6). The aim of research is to "elicit and understand how research respondents construct their individual and shared meanings around the phenomen[a] of interest" (ibid.; Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011). A research subject is nothing to be "discovered" and completely understood but rather a complex and context-specific phenomenon, which holds different meanings for those involved or affected. Thus, the aim of research in the constructivist paradigm is not to produce generalisable "truths". Instead, it acknowledges a variety of differing voices and does not judge their accurateness. It interprets voices "for what perspectives, practices, and assumptions [they] reveal[s]" and "seeks to link these testimonies to prevailing social discourses" (Schatz 2009, 13). Epistemologically, constructivism evaluates every knowledge as "situated" (Rose 1997) and co-produced. The principle of situatedness acknowledges the partiality of knowledge as being produced in specific circumstances, which shape it in some way (Rose 1997, 305). It denies viewing knowledge as independent object and instead treats it as evolving from the interaction of the researcher and the researched/respondents, acknowledging their influences on the generated data (Collins 1998).

I found this constructivist perspective best suited to account for the variety of differing and often contradictory opinions and accounts on Gorkhaland, its politics, and parties in Darjeeling that I came across during my research. It helped me to frame the question of the two-sided construction of political authority in relation to quotidian lifeworlds by accounting for the ways individuals (try to) make sense of their world, i.e. how they interpret events, their positions in social systems of power and their relations with each other, to the state and the nation. Insights from the constructivist paradigm also required me to continuously reflect on the effects of my own positionality as a female European researcher in a foreign context.

2.2.1 Subjectivity, positionality and reflexivity

Understanding knowledge as co-produced and situated calls for a reflection of the researcher on how her positionality (in terms of race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, sexuality, and scientific training) may influence the data generated (Katz 1994; Rose 1997; Collins 1998). Acknowledging their subjectivist stance requires researchers to articulate their assumptions and to provide transparency about the conditions under which research was done, and how their cultural, theoretical, and political context affected interactions with the subject (Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa 2012). Reflexivity also requires to display detours, dilemmas, and uncertainties, and to make visible the decision-making process leading to the choice of approaches, methods, field-sites etc. (Rose 1997; Collins 1998; Charmaz 2004;Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa 2012).

Understanding knowledge as co-constructed (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006) demands due attention to the interactions between the researcher and respondents during the research process. Transparent reflexivity requires the researcher to make her position known in terms of complex power relations between herself and the researched (Katz 1994; Rose 1997). Following a critical paradigm , a researcher should create a sense of reciprocity between research-respondents and herself (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006). Practically, this includes the adoption of a non-judgmental stance towards the respondents and their accounts and the investment of one's own personality in the research process to establish a more non-hierarchical relationship (ibid.). A technique to situate knowledge is to acknowledge the centrality of the researcher as author of the text (Denzin 2000; Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006). Making the researcher (and her positionality) visible in the authorship – as opposed to "silent authorship" (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996) – helps the reader to comprehend the analytical lenses through which the researcher generated and looked at the data (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006).

Acknowledging the importance of these requirements, Rose (1997) takes a more critical stance on the *possibility* of such transparent reflexivity, which attempts to make both the identity of the researcher (inward-reflexivity) and her relation to her research and the wider world (outward reflexivity) visible (ibid.). According to Rose, it is impossible to explicate and know the landscape of power one enters (and produces) during research, and one's own positions in it. Claiming otherwise would place researchers in position of Gods, "who claim to know how power works, but who are themselves powerful, able to see and know both themselves and the world in which they work" (ibid. 310). Ways out of this dilemma are to ask about how difference is constituted, to pay due attention to language and translations as ways to challenge researcher's assumptions, and to write uncertainties and tensions into the text. Rose proposes to view research as a process of constitutive negotiation in which social identities (of both researcher and researched) are mutually made and

remade. In this reading position is relational, and reflexivity becomes self-construction (ibid. 313, 314). Practically, Rose's contentions call for vigilance in the research process, and for acknowledging gaps in meaning and absences (ibid. 319).

These elaborations not only demand displaying the research process including its detours and dilemmas but also an elaboration on my own positionality (as far as I understand it), my relation to the research subject and to research respondents.

Pre-assumptions and detours

Initially – influenced by interviews with movement leader Bimal Gurung, which I had read in the internet – I had planned to study the Gorkhaland movement as an example for increasing democratisation in India, while accounting for the influences the "democratic" rhetoric of the movement leaders had on public perceptions of democracy. Initial readings on Darjeeling also provided me with a broad overview of political actors (mainly the regional parties), the special autonomy set-up for the region in form of a district council, and the political history of the district since the 18th century. Particularly the overthrow of the formerly ruling GNLF in 2007, and the rise of a new party, the GJM proclaiming a "democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian" agitation struck me as interesting entry-points for my research.

My first explorative field visit to Darjeeling, however, strongly contradicted my optimist assumptions about the democratic nature of the statehood agitation. Talking to different persons in Darjeeling including intellectuals (mostly journalists and lawyers) I realised how fractured the so-called "movement" was. Perceptions on the meanings of Gorkhaland seemed to be inconsistent. While some persons I initially spoke to held a largely optimist opinion about the ruling GJM party, others strongly criticised it for its alleged "authoritarian, violent, and corrupt" rule and for oppressing other regional parties or non-party voices. It seemed that serious issues concerning political authority, public representation, and leadership were hidden behind the proclaimed "democratic and non-violent" labels.

Such contradictions forced me to adapt my stand on politics in India and engage with anthropological literature on the constitution of political authority on the one hand and comparative politics' approaches to authoritarianism on the other. Both helped me to reframe my research by shifting the focus towards the construction of political authority and party politics in the broader context of the statehood movement.

During these explorations into Darjeeling politics I often felt my own European assumptions about how politics functions contradicted. Being confronted with the ways parties in the wake of the

statehood movement attempted to attain and maintain leadership, did not only call my assumptions but also my values and ideas about "how politics *should* function" strongly into question. Although such challenges to my pre-understandings and the entailed "surprises" facilitated the process of understanding and reconstruction of socially held beliefs and perspectives – as they forced me to review and question my assumptions in close interaction with research respondents – the confrontation with political violence and the role it plays in Darjeeling underlined the difficulties in understanding respondents' perspectives and world-views.

I remember an instance when a mob of GJM activists had forcefully stopped a pick-up truck with GNLF supporters from proceeding to attend a public meeting (see Chapter 6). I stood close-by when the men began shaking and hitting the truck. I was pretty shocked and disturbed by what I had seen. When I spoke about the event later to a friend from the same village (and a member of the GJM) he smiled and said: "Miriam, that was nothing. Nobody got injured." Was he just trying to play-down the incident, or was it really "nothing"? Was I overestimating the meaning of the incident? Indeed, other clashes sometimes included stone-pelting and the use of sharp weapons (see Chapter 7). Shaking a pick-up was nothing compared to that – or was it? Hardly a month later there was the chance of a clash between GJM and CPRM supporters at a planned CPRM-meeting in Darjeeling which I wanted to observe (see Chapter 8). A journalist friend had warned me of the probability of a clash but – unlike a month earlier – I realised that I was much more relaxed. Did I myself get used to political violence? Was I *accepting* it as part of the political game in Darjeeling (and India)? Was this what it was like for people in Darjeeling – a common, non-surprising, and acceptable incidence, a non-welcomed but every-day occurrence one has to live with?

Relationships to research respondents

A second aspect of situating knowledge entails a critical attention and reflection on the researcher's relationships to research respondents[36]. How did they react to my requests for interviews and/or to my presence in their lives? Did they trust me and did I trust them? What type of power-relations evolved during the interactions? Generally, most persons I spoke to were very welcoming, warm, and helpful. Leaders of political parties happily granted me time for interviews and often shared how pleased they were that an international researcher was showing interest in their agitation, providing an "international audience" to their claims. Most leaders also agreed to audio-recording of interviews. These interviews were conducted in leaders' homes or party-offices during the day-time –

[36] I prefer the term "respondent" instead of "participant" as the latter would suggest that I discussed the research results with them, which I only did in some cases. Although the term "respondent" suggests a solely functional relationship, actually some of them became friends during the research process. I do not use the term "informant" here to avoid possible misunderstandings, which would reduce these persons to the purpose of "data-extraction" or could even suggest that they were acting as "spies".

depending on their preferences. These interviews mostly stayed focussed on my questions, and respondents only seldom asked any personal questions about me beyond my institutional affiliation and origin. Interviews with intellectuals or those not directly involved with the parties were similar, although in general the nature of the conversation was a bit more informal, and sometimes led to more personal interactions going beyond the research topic.

Also in tea plantation villages I felt welcomed. I am very grateful to my host families, who invested lots of attention and time in making my stays comfortable besides guiding me through the villages and facilitating meetings with other people, including local leaders, unionists, administrators, and other workers. Many workers shared that they had always wanted to talk to a “white” person, whom they sometimes saw when visiting Darjeeling town, or who at times visit the managers of the plantations, when sent by foreign tea-companies – rendering them inaccessible. Once the initial shyness was overcome, especially women expressed their happiness to be able to communicate with me in Nepali and asked all kinds of questions, i.e. on the food we ate in Germany, my family situation, my work (and income), living situation etc. I got the impression that the fact that I joined both men and women during the work and lunch-time limited initial hierarchies (although not completely) and provided the chance to interact more frequently and in an informal context. Some women also invited me to their houses to have tea or eat together. Staying with host families and spending lots of time with workers helped me to situate and understand their views on Gorkhaland and politics in relation to their specific living contexts, joys and sorrows, moral values, and interpretations of their lifeworlds.

2.3 Following the subject: multiple sites and perspectives

My aim to understand the construction of political authority in the broader context of the Gorkhaland agitation from different sites and perspectives demanded data generation at more than one field-site in order to allow an inclusion of views from persons of differential social, economic and political positions. The approach of multi-sited ethnography was helpful for this endeavour because it departs from the concept of the field as a geographically defined locality – typically a village or town – and understands a topic as interconnected with different processes happening at different sites (Wittel 2000). This calls for “multiple sites of observation and participation” (Marcus 1995, 95). After introducing the premises of the multi-sited approach I explain its application and implications for my research.

2.3.1 Multi-sited ethnography

Inspired by developments in cultural studies (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) and an understanding of space as socially produced (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Falzon 2009), multi-sited ethnography evolved from a critique of the understanding of social and cultural phenomena as spatially bounded and the related conceptualisation of the "field" as a "container of a particular set of social relations which could be studied and possibly compared with the contents of other containers elsewhere" (Falzon 2009, 1). In contrast, the approach understand its research objects as inherently fragmented and multiply situated (Falzon 2009, 2; Nadai and Maeder 2005). It proposes to understand cultural logics and difference as produced through the intersection and interrelations of multiple fields (Marcus 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1992) which "cross-cut dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global', the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'". (Marcus 1995, 95)

Practically this means that social phenomena cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site only (Falzon 2009). This multi-sitedness does, however, not only concern the plurality of geographical locations of an object. It also refers to the dispersion of sites in terms of cultural difference that allows a juxtaposition of data. This distinguishes the approach from multiperspectivism (ibid.).

This conceptualisation has implications for the research methodology. Instead of researching social and cultural phenomena in depth through extended and intense field-stays in a geographically circumscribed field, the research is now designed around "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations" (Marcus 1995, 105). The essence of multi-sited research is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space (Falzon 2009, 1, 2). This also includes following a conflict (e.g. conflict parties, as in my study) (Marcus 1995). To meet the requirement of different field sites, the multi-sited approach suggests a contextualisation and diversification of methods (see Chapter 2.3.2).

Wittel (2000), Hannerz (2003), and Nadai et al. (2005) respond to the recurrent criticism that multi-sitedness happens at the cost of ethnographic depth by stressing that the objective of research in multi-sited ethnography is less to search for deep dimensions within a culture or hidden layers of meaning but more to study selected issues which are understood as "created in between" sites (Wittel 2000, 5). Shallowness, so Falzon (2009), can be part of the studied phenomenon itself.

Production of the field

Multi-sited ethnography adopts an understanding of social phenomena as produced at and between multiple sites. Inspired by ideas of the social production of space, contenders of the approach stress that there is no pre-existing research-field with clear boundaries to explore (Falzon 2009; Marcus

1995). As contours and relationships of the object of study are not known beforehand (Marcus 1995), the field is "fuzzy" (Nadai and Maeder 2005, 4). It only evolves "as it is eventually written up" (Marcus 1995, 102): in interaction with research respondents, researchers consciously choose field sites and construct and display connections amongst these (Falzon 2009; Marcus 1995). Marcus (1995) noted that the drawing of boundaries (around the field) and selection of sites for data generation does not only pre-structure findings but also spatialises difference. This makes the framing of the field a political practice (Marcus 1995; Wittel 2000) and underlines that multi-sitedness does not draw a holistic picture of an object of study as some criticise (Hage 2005). This awareness demands a reflection on the processes of the production of the field (Falzon 2009).

Political implications

Although a strength of the multi-sited approach is its ability to display connections between and juxtapose positions, the agenda entails certain risks for the researcher as it can have serious political implications for her positionality and identity. Marcus describes the researcher as a "circumstantial activist" (Marcus 1995, 113), who moves across sites and levels of society. In conflict contexts this can entail a confrontation with contradictory personal commitments, which requires a renegotiation of one's identities at different sites (ibid.). Criticising Marcus' stand as "politically naïve", Gille (2001) importantly notes the risks of moving across sites in politically charged settings, where, for instance, associations with one party of the conflict might lead opposing parties to consider that the ethnographer is a spy of the other site. "As soon as the social relations among sites manifest themselves in actual political battles, the assumption of an activist role in any of the sites is suicidal" (ibid. 328, 329).

Gille's account importantly reminds us not only of the difficult manoeuvres which multi-sited ethnography requires in conflict situations but also of her ethical position in situations when insights gained from engagement at different (conflicting) sites results in challenges to personally held moral values and beliefs.

2.3.2 Applying multi-sited ethnography in Darjeeling

In my study the "sites" refer to different sites of the construction of political authority, sites of the production of "Gorkhaland" as a geographical imagination and the sites of the "movement" and agitation. Paying attention to different sites and exploring their relations also permitted an exploration of the fractures within the Gorkhaland movement. These sites were, however, less dispersed in terms of geographic location – as nearly all of them were in or near Darjeeling district (and one in Kathmandu/Nepal, another in Dehra Dun). I understood them more as differing in terms of "cultural difference" (cf. Falzon 2009) in so far as they were produced in interaction with

respondents sharply distinguished by their socio-economic positions and the roles they played in both the statehood agitation and politics.

Choice of field sites

The initial choice of the field-sites was influenced by explorative questions on the organisation, programme, and participants of the Gorkhaland agitation. As the research progressed, these initial concerns were complemented by questions on the actual practices of the movement and the construction of political authority. The choice of field-sites was further determined by my pre-understanding of the Gorkhaland agitation (as happening at various possibly interconnected places and being constituted by various actors) and my interest in the construction of political authority as a two-sited process between rulers and ruled. The latter demanded an inclusion of political actors at different levels of decision making and of those over whom they sought authority. To analyse processes of political authority formation and resistance I especially wanted to study how different parties struggle over it in their respective localities.

Accordingly, I had already roughly defined part of the field sites I wanted to use as entry point applying a purposive sampling (Patton 2002; Flick 2007) with the aim to account for variations of perceptions, sites, and actors. The initial choice of persons to meet was partly based on recommendations of a journalist and another social scientist with expertise in the area and partly on my own pre-understanding and initial overview of political leaders and actors gained mainly from newspaper reviews. The first two shorter phases of my field work (four and two weeks respectively) were largely explorative. They mainly focussed on the higher-level leadership of different political parties, combined with interviews with intellectuals, who often provided a very important and critical counter-position to the formers' accounts. Most of these interviews were conducted in Darjeeling town (such as party offices, or leaders' private residencies), and some in Kalimpong town. Explorations of the national and international dimensions of the Gorkhaland demand also led me to Dehradun and to Kathmandu/Nepal, where I met with a group demanding Darjeeling as part of a "Greater Nepal".

Later I increasingly followed and explored relations between field sites that emerged during the research process. During my third extended field phase lasting five months I complemented the above sites with stays in three different tea plantations (two months in the first plantation and a week each in the second and third plantations)[37]. During my last field stay I added another four weeks in the third plantation and revisited the first for one week but had to exclude the second site

[37] The short duration in the second plantation owes to the perception that my stay there was somewhat orchestrated by local GJM members.

due to time-constraints. The choice of the three tea-plantations was guided by practical and conceptual consideration. Practically (i.e. in terms of accessibility) I relied on friends' help to establish contacts to host-families. Conceptionally, I ensured that different parties were present at the respective sites. Thus, I first spent time in a tea plantation, where the GJM dominated but CPRM had a certain hold (as communicated in an interview with CPRM president R.B. Rai). The choice of the second field site was influenced by a recommendation of a GJM-youth leader, who facilitated my stay in a plantation dominated by GJM and lacking open presence of opposition parties. The choice of the third tea-plantation field site was spontaneous as I followed the trail of GJM president Bimal Gurung, who had engaged himself in a welfare campaign in a cluster of tea estates known for their strong CPRM-presence. Here, I wanted to study the local reactions to this campaign.

To study politicians' performance I also added "event spaces": I did not only observe various (attempted) public meetings and demonstrations – most of them in Darjeeling town, some in tea plantations, and one at the office of a Block Development Officer – but also shadowed one GTA councillor by accompanying him from early morning till late night during his political work in his constituency (see below). Another distinct site was constituted in meetings with journalists and intellectuals, most of them in Darjeeling and Kalimpong towns. Thus, my field was spread between tea plantation villages as an important mass base of political parties and central party-offices as sites where I met and interacted with higher and top-level party leaders. The simultaneousness of these activities allowed me to see different perspectives and observations in relation, and to assess similarities, further contradictions, and puzzles.

My attempt at multi-sitedness, however, also met with some "political" difficulties. Like Gille (2001), I increasingly found myself confronted with the need to navigate my position through the different sites without evoking suspicions or perceptions of bias. Initially, this manoeuvring between different sites – especially the different party offices of conflicting parties – was facilitated by my identity as a European researcher, who despite asking about politics was herself (initially) not perceived as involved in politics.

To facilitate this image as non-biased and to account for differing views I made sure that I spent time with both GJM and CPRM activists in the tea plantations and to meet representatives of other parties (GNLF, AIGL, BGP, CPI-M, TMC, DDCC). While I stayed with a CPRM-affiliated family in the first tea plantation, I lived in the house of a GJM youth activist in the second, and a politically less involved family in the third plantation. Also while staying at different sites I recorded perspectives from different party-affiliated sides. Yet, a few times respondents were suspicious about my role and one GNLF leader even thought I was a spy sent by Bimal Gurung. GJM president Bimal Gurung himself did let me know that he had monitored my visits to a CPRM strong-hold village as he knew whom I had

met and spoken to. I got the strong feeling that he disapproved of my stay in that village and I was relieved to leave Darjeeling after the rather heated interview with him.

In another instance I got the strong feeling that the GTA councillor I was shadowing tried to utilise me to generate additional legitimacy for himself. He did not only refer to me in public speeches but also made me sit close to him on the stage during public meetings. I had to decline his request of giving a speech at one of these events, although I was afraid that my clear refusal might impede the friendship which developed between us. Such navigations were influenced by the confrontation with different and conflicting perspectives which increasingly put into question my positionality. The more I heard about practices of GJM-rule the more I also found my own moral values challenged. I increasingly found myself confronted with the question of whose site I was taking.

Hearing stories of persons, who were denied payment in governmental schemes by local GJM-leaders, who instead chose to take such money for themselves (see Chapter 6) made me angry and sad. The longer I spend time in Darjeeling and the more such stories of corruption and violent oppression I heard the more I felt an urge to act, to change things. This strongly called into question my attempts to be non-biased and as objective as possible and not be judgemental to respondents. I have to admit that such attempts became futile in some instances. Making use of my position as a European female researcher, which owed me some respect I began to challenge certain persons in interviews, including party-leader Bimal Gurung, also to see how they would react to critical allegations. Ultimately, after the official end of data generation, I supported a friend to collect evidence against a group of corrupt local leaders. In a village meeting attended by the *gram panchayat* secretary, members of a recently established GNLF unit, and the accused (including a GJM central committee member) it was decided to withdraw their positions as supervisors in the governmental 100-days-employment guarantee scheme in order to stop the blatant corruption. Upon returning to the village some months later I witnessed how my friend was physically attacked one evening by a member of the same group, an incidence that led to filing a police case and left me unsure whether and when I could ever return to that village, where my presence was apparently not welcomed by some powerful local actors.

This incidence underlines that doing research in a politically charged context in Darjeeling is necessarily “political”. Even asking respondents to reflect on their own positions in systems of power might raise suspicions on the sides of those who wish to stay in power and maintain their authority by any means. The ideal of “non-bias” I found was simply not applicable in the context I was researching and of which I became increasingly a part myself. I was caught between the sid/tes. As a consequence, instead of claiming “objectivity” of my position, I tried to account for the multitude of voices and opinions on certain issues.

Methods

I chose different methods for data-generation, which were adapted to the requirements of the respective field-sites. In the tea plantations I involved in a selective and focussed form of participant observation (Kawulich 2005), which I combined with directed conversations and – if applicable – with semi-structured interviews. The aim was not to understand various aspects of people's lives in detail but instead to systematically look out for incidences and opinions related to the Gorkhaland agitation and political contestations. To facilitate the thematic focusing I relied very much on the help of local key-persons – mostly members of my host families – whom I roughly explained my research purpose during the initial days of my stay and who helped me a lot in facilitating meetings with persons I was interested in (e.g. local leaders, unionists, and other tea plantation workers). Usually, in the mornings I joined the plantation workers during their work. Being aware of the politically sensitive nature of my research initially our conversations centred on their working conditions, before I began asking about Gorkhaland. I soon realised that asking about party politics was difficult, particularly because other persons could possibly overhear such conversations. In order to ensure that my presence or politically sensitive questions did not harm respondents I sought interview situations, where I could be alone with them. I ensured them to treat their names and those of the field sites confidentially. None of these interviews or conversations were recorded. Accounts of other tea plantation residents as well as discussions with friends from a road-side village complemented the data.

As many of the conversations were conducted in groups it is hard to tell an exact number of persons and workers I spoke to. While during my shorter stay on the second plantation I spoke to around 20-30 persons only, the number was much higher on the first and third plantation. Amongst those persons interviewed were 30 local political leaders from different parties. Besides workers, I also interviewed other residents, including drivers, old persons, shop-keepers, and teachers (all together about 20 persons).

Another major means of data generation were semi-structured interviews (Flick 2007). These were especially helpful when interacting with politicians, intellectuals, and journalists. Most of them allowed me to record these interviews, which I later transcribed. All together I utilised 48 semi-structured interviews with 43 persons for this study. 32 of them were audio-recorded and 28 transcribed in detail (see Appendix B).

Another important source of insights into how political work functions was the shadowing (McDonald 2005) of a GTA councillor during 5 days of his work in his constituency in 2012. Shadowing designates a method where the researcher literally stays with and closely follows a person during his/her day, including participation in meetings or travels. Throughout the shadowing

period the researcher can ask questions or seek explanations of incidences that happened or the activities of the respondent(s) (ibid.). The shadowing of the GTA councillor did not only allow me to gain a first-hand impression of the way he engages with supporters (and the supporters with him, e.g. during the morning receptions) but also to observe (and ask) how he practically conducted political work while meeting challenges to maintain his support base. These observations were highly useful to complement the perspectives of the ruled. The shadowing also allowed me to cross-check and discuss interpretations from earlier field stays.

My attention to performances of politics and the situational generation of political authority at the above field sites also led to case studies. These mainly evolved around incidents of inter-party violence, concrete performances of political work, and the organisation of political meetings. Drawing on a constructivist case-study approach (Stake 2006; Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa 2012), the case studies served as entrance points to explore different perspectives on such events as promoted by political activists/leaders, the media, supporters, and rivals, and helped me to explore underlying structures of political contestations in Darjeeling. Such case-studies are presented as part of the Chapters 6, 7, and 8. I complemented the so-generated ethnographic data with reviews of articles in local, State, and national newspapers; analyses of official party pamphlets and documents; as well as audio and video recordings of political meetings between 2005 and 2013.

Table 3 provides a detailed overview of research questions, data sources, and study sites. (Appendix B includes a list of semi-structured interviews cited or used for this study.)

Limitations and access to the field

My choice of field-sites aimed at highlighting and juxtaposing certain perspectives but I acknowledge that this choice possibly ignored others rendering it somewhat "political". Although I tried to immerse myself in the field as much as possible, the necessary split-up of field time between different locations forced me to focus on my research questions and push the focus of interviews and conversations towards the question of Gorkhaland and politics instead of gaining more ethnographic depth.

The attempt to multi-sitedness, however, was compromised by the limited access to certain fields. For instance, due to the politically sensitive nature of my topic I decided not to approach representatives of the West Bengal government, or the Indian central government to learn more about their position on Darjeeling. Accounts and interpretations of the government are thus largely based on newspaper reports or interpretations of intellectuals I spoke to. The only exception is an

interview conducted with the previous minister-in-charge for Hill Affairs[38] and (later) Urban Development minister (CPI-M) Ashok Bhattacharya, who was regarded as a major antagonist of Subash Ghisingh. I met him in 2012, after the CPI-M had lost power in West Bengal. I also did not have a chance to interact with district or block-level administrators in Darjeeling, which would have added an important perspective on the way governance worked during the agitation. My clear focus on party-political actors also foreclosed more attention to other actors including ethnic associations which during the research period assumed increasing importance as political actors negotiating their positions towards the state (see Chapter 8). Although I sought information about civil society associations (without party-political affiliation), most experts simply noted their "non-existence". My priorisation of tea plantations as sites for political contestations and time-constraints also entailed an exclusion of agricultural settlement (*bastī*) areas.

2.4 Documentation and analysis

The quality of qualitative research is evaluated along the criteria of precision, credibility, conformability, consistency, authenticity, and transferability (Seale 1999; Golafshani 2003; Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011). Lincon et al. (2011) propose that a major criterion to evaluate the "validity" of research is authenticity, referring to the question of whether one may trust oneself to act on the implications of one's research (ibid. 120). Another criterion, particularly important in politically charged contexts is "fairness", which seeks to present all (or as many as possible) stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, and concerns in order to prevent marginalisation of voices (ibid.). Such concerns do not only relate to the final presentation of data but also to the processes of data generation and documentation and analysis, issues I address in the following discussion.

[38] The West Bengal Government's Hill Affairs Department functions as a nodal Department to monitor all development works in the hill-areas of Darjeeling district.

Table 3: Overview of research aims, questions, data sources and methods during the different phases of data generation

Aims/aspects	Questions	Data sources/ respondents	Methods
Phase 1 – explorative (January/February 2011)			
Gain first overview of field, the Gorkhaland agitation, its main political actors; find puzzles; design research questions; test and revise pre-assumptions	What is the Gorkhaland movement about? Who are the main actors promoting the demand? How do they justify their demand? What is the political situation in Darjeeling like? Who are the major stakeholders, and what is their relation to each other? How does the ruling party respond to allegations of their rule through violence?	Leaders of Darjeeling political parties (in Darjeeling and Kalimpong towns; Dehra Dun)	Semi-structured interviews
Focus on political representatives and regional experts		Intellectuals/experts	"
		Residents of Darjeeling town	Informal interviews
		Secondary sources	review
Phase 2 – specification of research questions/data-generation (June/July 2011)			
Compare accounts of different regional political parties; ways of justification of Gorkhaland demand	What are the differences in regional parties' accounts on Gorkhaland? What does Gorkhaland mean to them?	Leaders of Darjeeling regional parties (Darjeeling)	Semi-structured interviews
	How do party-leaders describe their relation to other parties?	Public party-meeting/Darjeeling	Observation
Further explore factions and conflicts within the statehood agitation	How do they characterise the political situation in Darjeeling and their opportunities to voice critique?	Party pamphlets, newspaper articles	Review
	Where are the strongholds of different parties?		
Explore international dimension of the statehood demand	In how far does the Gorkhaland issue relate to developments in Nepal and demands for a "Greater Nepal"?	Leaders of Greater Nepal group (Kathmandu)	Semi-structured interview
Phase 3 – Data generation/exploration of perceptions on the ground (March-July 2012)			
Explore followers' perspectives on Gorkhaland and politics in Darjeeling (focus on tea plantation residents); compare politicians' and non-politicians' perspectives	What does Gorkhaland mean to those not actively engaged in political associations? What hopes and aspirations does the demand hold for those in whose name the new State is being demanded?	Tea plantation workers/ dwellers	Participant observation
		Local and medium-level political leaders/activists	Informal interviews
Understand the supremacy of	How does the struggle for		

the GJM and the construction of political authority; reconstruct its appeal to people and attaining power in 2007/08 Analyse the strategies for rule of the GJM, their perception by the ruled, and possible resistance Explore how local governance works amidst the lack of elected institutions at the district and local levels Expand the historical perspective to pre-1980 Cross-check with experts; add case-studies	authority register in localities? How is it experienced and interpreted? How do the ruled adapt to such power struggles? Which factors influence their choice of political party? What meaning and importance does "politics" have in people's lives? How do individuals explain the supremacy of the GJM and what do they think about the party and its leaders? How do they evaluate their performance against morally defined values and aspirations?	Upper-level party-leaders Intellectuals Members of local administration/*gram panchayat*s Journalists/ intellectuals Public party meetings (attempted, actual) Party pamphlets, newspaper articles	Semi-structured interviews " " Observation review
Phase 4 – Review and testing (June/July 2013)			
Test preliminary findings and categories from analyses for accuracy, e.g. by discussing interpretations with respondents and re-visiting field sites Further explore "contradictions"/things I am not sure about Track the processes after the GTA elections (July 2012)	What has happened after the GTA elections? Whether people's perceptions of politics and political leaders have changed? If so how? How has the political environment in Darjeeling changed? What are the chances for opposition parties to gain ground?	Experts/journalists, intellectuals Tea plantation workers/dwellers Party-leaders	Semi-structured interviews Participant observation/ informal interviews Semi-structured interviews/ shadowing

2.4.1 Documentation

Upon returning from my field-stays I had a variety of different data. If possible, I had audio-recorded accounts and interviews but the politically charged nature of my research subject forced me to collect the majority of statements in a field-diary, which also contained a compilation of memos based on my observations. It served as a reflective tool not only to access my research questions but also my own thoughts and interpretations (see Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006; Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa 2012). This was important to keep watch on how my own interpretations shaped the research process and co-construction of meaning. Thus, besides transcribed and translated semi-

structured interviews, I mainly had notes on semi-structured and informal interviews, memos displaying accounts of respondents (mostly from tea plantations) and my own reflections, in addition to a bulk of newspaper articles and party-pamphlets. Further, a friend had shared video-records of some political speeches of the GNLF and GJM[39]. I analysed the bulk of the material with qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000) where I first searched for thematic categories and then extracted accounts in relation to my research questions.

2.4.2 Analysis

I used triangulation (in a constructivist paradigm, cf. Seale, 1999; Golafshani, 2003) to compare findings from different data sources and sites. It served as a tool to acquire information on multiple and diverse realities (Golafshani 2003, 604) and to search "for convergence [or difference] amongst multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell and Miller 2000, 126). Thereby, I was not only looking for convergence amongst data-sets (e.g. statements of residents from different tea plantations) but combined the information attained from different sources to generate a fuller and more complex picture of the topic (Nightingale 2009). For instance, I compared and juxtaposed accounts of residents from different tea plantations, of party-workers at different levels of the party-hierarchy, and intellectuals and journalists. Another important source for such triangulation was my own observations, as well as newspaper articles. Thus, my sampling along multiple sites facilitated the triangulation of information between different sites representing multiple perspectives and voices.

Another way to increase the authenticity of data was to regularly discuss my findings or understandings with knowledgeable persons from different places, including intellectuals, and other persons I perceived as critical and reflective. I also confronted certain politicians with accusations I had heard to test their reactions. Very important for testing the authenticity of my understanding was also the last field stay which gave me the chance to review open questions and to apply my understanding. During the writing process and the generation of case-studies I regularly reviewed the original material to test its coherence with my interpretations.

For translations of the material from Nepali to English I mostly relied on my own knowledge of the language. I was able to conduct all interviews without the help of an interpreter. I transcribed and translated the recorded semi-structured interviews largely myself and with occasional support from Nepalese friends. Owing to time constraints, however, I relied on an interpreter for the translation of longer newspaper articles or audio-records of political speeches. I reviewed these transcripts and – if necessary – again edited them with the help of a friend from Darjeeling. My understanding of Nepali

[39] These recordings were done during 2005 and 2011.

helped me to account for cultural specifics in expression and strongly facilitated my understanding of people's lifeworlds.

2.5 Insightful gaps and incomplete stories

The above elaborations underline that my research on politics in Darjeeling met with certain limits, mainly posed by the secrecy and sensitivity of my research subject and the comparably brief period of field research particularly on the tea plantations and by the partly circumscribed access to the field.

The juxtaposition of different perspectives as part of the triangulation sometimes led to contradictions and incompleteness in data resulting in a "gap". I do, however, not regard these as limitations of the study but rather assume that this "gap" of knowledge and understanding – which was often reflected in accounts of respondents – is part of the way politics and systems of power in Darjeeling work (see also Nightingale 2009)[40]. It underlines the secrecy of the subject and reinstates the initially cited account of journalist Niraj Lama who states that "even those involved [in hill politics] are very much unaware of what is going on".

I have already discussed the influence of my own political standpoint and moral concerns that evolved during my research. This has influenced the way I present data and opinions in this work. Therefore, I try to establish transparency when my own opinions are involved. In sum, this study attempts to draw a story, which accounts for the multiplicity of often conflicting perspectives. Thus, this study does not write a definite story about Darjeeling but rather weave a variety of individuals' accounts and author's observations, analyses, and interpretations together as *one possible* story, which is necessarily incomplete.

[40] I owe this view to a conversation with Jonathan Spencer.

3 Historical legacies of authoritarian rule: Politics of pre and post-Independence

3.1 Introduction: Political time

During interviews in Sri Lanka on oral history, anthropologist Jonathan Spencer noticed how respondents' long-term time-reckoning was inflected politically. Spencer called the way people segmented the past in political terms as "political time" (Spencer 2007, 125). In Darjeeling such segmentations are common: people referred to the pre-Independence time as *Britishko pālo* (British time); they said *chhyāsī* ('86) when referring to the GNLF's violent movement for statehood; and *Ghisinghko pālo* (Ghisingh's time) for the phase of GNLF rule and the DGHC (1988-2008). Each of these time-phases expresses certain feelings and memories and corresponds to changes in regimes and how politics was conducted in Darjeeling. Significantly, politics in Darjeeling district had not always been characterised by a dominant party-regime, which is reflected in pre-1980 election results (see Table 4). Taking these "political times" as a reference frame, the aim of this chapter is to reconstruct the factors which led to the emergence of a dominant-party regime in Darjeeling from 1980. I contend that the rise of the GNLF as the dominant party was preceded and paralleled by a rise and spread of ethnic consciousness as the defining trait of political subjectivities. In researching this evolution of ethnic consciousness I place special emphasis on the role of political parties and organisations, and the ways they voiced, promoted, and framed the ethnic agenda since the beginning of the 20th century. Comparing the forms of party-political competition and public bases for support before and after 1980, I show that the ascendance of the GNLF and its demand for Gorkhaland demarcates a major shift in Darjeeling's political regime — the dominance of the statehood discourse and ethnic consciousness for defining political subjectivities and the cementing of a state-supported dominant party-regime, which exists in Darjeeling till today.

The chapter is structured as follows: Chapter 3.2 reviews different explanations for the evolution of a "Gorkha" identity in Darjeeling since the colonial time. This includes a brief outline of the historical formation of today's Darjeeling district, and the demographic shifts initiated through the British establishment of a "hill station" since 1835. I then review approaches which show how special administrative-territorial arrangements for Darjeeling fostered ethnic exclusivism before and after Independence, and planted the roots for what today is called the "identity crisis" of Indian Gorkhas. The third part (3.3) explores the role of political parties and organisations in framing and spreading ethnic consciousness in the 20th century. It critically reviews in how far articulations of ethnic identity in terms of demands for administrative autonomy were appealing to the masses, or whether there were other bases of political support. In redrawing the evolution of political parties in Darjeeling, I

show how – partly in response to state policy towards Darjeeling – ethnic consciousness spread from the upper to the middle and lower classes of society. In order to derive a better understanding of the political regime pre-1980, this chapter also asks about the forms of political contestation between political parties, the role of non-party-political formations and of non-ethnicity based issues in negotiating people's relations with the state. Chapter 3.4 traces the origins of the party that would dominate Darjeeling for 20 years, the GNLF and its leader Subash Ghisingh. It analyses how the discourse of "Gorkhaland" not only became a major defining trait of people's subjectivity but was also coupled with the establishment of a dominant party regime in Darjeeling. Chapter 3.5 focuses on *Ghisinghko pālo* since 1988. It displays how the dominant party regime was institutionalised through the establishment of the state-sponsored autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). The DGHC agreement transformed the relations between the state and dominant party by institutionalising their mutual dependency while simultaneously shrinking the spaces for public participation and democratic process in Darjeeling. The final part concludes that in this process the imagination of Gorkhaland was transformed from an emotional vision to an instrument in regional political competition.

The discussion is largely based on a combination of earlier studies on the Gorkhaland agitation (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Middleton 2013c) and the functioning of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (Chakrabarty 2005; Ganguly 2005; Sarkar 2013). Unfortunately, regarding the time before 1980, most of these studies remain focused on the party and government and exclude the voices in whose names demands were staged. I try to fill some of these gaps by adding evidence from primary sources including the articles from the *Times of India* (hereafter *ToI*) and interviews I conducted with elderly residents of tea plantations.

3.2 The evolution of ethnic consciousness

3.2.1 Shifting boundaries – changing people

The rule over Darjeeling district has for long been the subject of contention. It is impossible to understand today's situation without accounting for Darjeeling's historical cross-border relations and their effects on the evolution of ethno-regionalism in Darjeeling (cf. Shneiderman 2010). Before Darjeeling district with its present four sub-divisions (see Map, p. xxi) was formed and became part of the Bengal Presidency of British India it had belonged to the Kingdom of Sikkim, to the Gorkha Kingdom, and – the parts east of the river Teesta (today's Kalimpong sub-division) – to Bhutan. In 1780 the expanding Gorkha Kingdom conquered Sikkim and what today are Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions including areas of the Terai region (in today's Siliguri sub-division). The East India

Company (EIC) defeated the Gorkhas in the "Gorkha"-war from 1814-1816. The Treaty of Sugauli (1816) established today's national boundaries between Nepal and India[41] and the conquered parts of Darjeeling were returned to the Kingdom of Sikkim in 1817 following the Treaty of Titaliya (Subba 1992).

The actual creation of Darjeeling district began in 1835, when the King of Sikkim ceded the tract of Darjeeling as a "deed of grant" to the EIC. In 1861, the EIC annexed and added the Sikkim Terai to the emerging district (today's Siliguri sub-division), and in addition made Sikkim a *de facto* protectorate of the British government (Treaty of Tunlong) (Samanta 2000, 34, 35)[42]. Darjeeling district took its final shape only in 1866: the Anglo-Bhutan war ended with the Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 and today's Kalimpong sub-division (which had been under Bhutanese control from 1706 to 1864) was added to the district (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000). The British annexation of Bhutanese areas also included the Dooars, the area of dense jungle stretching at the southern border of Bhutan[43]. Darjeeling remained part of the Bengal Presidency (since 1905 the Province of Bengal) till the Indian Independence. Anecdotes tell that before it was about to be added to the West Bengal State one month after Independence, the Pakistani flag was hoisted at the Darjeeling Town Hall for four days (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000, 23).

The British annexation entailed far-reaching consequences for Darjeeling in terms of its economy, infrastructure, and demography, all reflecting its functions as a "hill station" catering to the interests of the European settlers. Initially intended as a sanatorium for the Europeans to recover from the hot plains, Darjeeling also carried political, military, educational, and economic functions (Chatterji 2007). Its geo-political position between Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan and the proximity to China underlined its strategic importance. Together with other hill stations at the northern frontier of the British Empire it formed part of a "chain of fortresses" to protect the British Indian Empire from feared intrusions by Russia and China during the "Great Game" (ibid. 86). Darjeeling was also one of the major points in the trade route to Tibet, and was even considered as the gateway through which the commerce and culture of the West could reach Central Asia (Samanta 2000, 46;Chatterji 2007, 101). The free trade encouraged merchants from the Indian plains to settle there and weekly markets became the centres of trade activities (ibid.). Roads were constructed and in 1881 the

[41] In 1860, the EIC returned parts of the Terai to Nepal as gratitude for the Rana rulers' help in suppressing the Sepoy Mutini of 1857.

[42] Initially the annual allowance was 6,000 rupees. In 1861 the annual allowance to Sikkim for the ceded areas was increased from 9,000 rupees in 1868 to 12,000 rupees in 1873.

[43] *Duar* in Bengali means door, and the belt belonging to the Cooch Behar Kingdom – a British protectorate - was considered essential for the security of the plains and for trade and commerce at that time. Continuous raids of Bhutanese local chiefs provoked the war which eventually resulted in the ceding of the territories to British India and made Bhutan a *de facto* British protectorate (Samanta 2000).

famous Himalayan Railway reached Darjeeling. The establishment of high-quality educational institutions, in addition to leisure facilities gave Darjeeling an increasingly "European" touch. The upper parts of Darjeeling town were reserved for the European elite; the lower elevations housed the "natives". This ethnic and social separation was (and partly still is) reflected in socio-spatial segregation (Chatterji 2007, 81). From the 1880s on Darjeeling became the summer-capital of the Bengal Presidency (Kenny 1995; Chatterji 2007).

The most significant changes, however, were caused by the establishment of the tea economy and the opening of a recruitment centre for the British Indian army in the second half of the 19th century, which heavily reworked the demography of the district. The commercial planting of tea began in 1852[44]. In 1866 the number of tea plantations had increased from 3 to 39, and by 1891 there were 177 tea plantations on an area of 45,000 acres in Darjeeling district (Subba 1992, 45). The sparsely inhabited district however lacked sufficient man-power. British sources mention that the region was only habituated by a few hundred Lepcha (or *Rang*), who were regarded as the aboriginal population (O'Malley 1907; Subba 1992; Chatterji 2007). At around the same time, since 1846, the Rana family had established its firm dominance in Nepal, while rendering the Shah Kings mere marionettes. The Ranas did not only impose a rigid caste system in Nepal but their policy also resulted in land dispossessions. These also affected the eastern parts of Nepal, bordering Darjeeling. In contrast, the British promised those oppressed by the Ranas a better life and paid work, and thereby enticed thousands of people from East Nepal[45].

A second factor encouraging migration was the British Army recruitment of Nepalis or "Gurkhas" who were believed to belong to a "martial race" of "warlike", "hardy", fierce, and brave soldiers[46], loyal to the British crown (Caplan 1995; Samanta 2000, 25)[47]. It is believed that the British encouraged the settlement of ex-servicemen in Darjeeling also in order to create a segment of "loyal citizens" as a "counter-balance" to the as hostile regarded Lepcha and Bhutia. The latter refer to Tibetan stemming groups such as Sherpa or Yolmo (Samanta 2000, 40 ff.). Samanta regards such differentiations as influential factors contributing to a sense of ethnic exclusiveness amongst the Gorkhas (ibid. 75). In no time, the Nepalese outnumbered other groups of the district, mainly the

[44] Initially three plantations in proximity to Darjeeling town were opened: Tukvar, Steinthal, and Aloobari.
[45] Native *sardārs* recruited workers from Nepal. Today, many settlements that were created this way still carry the name of the respective *sardārs.*
[46] The martial race theory was established by Lord Roberts, Commander in Chief of the Indian Army from 1885-1893. The aim of the Gorkhas' recruitment was to "substitute man of more warlike and hardy races for the Hindusthani sepoys of Bengal, the Tamils and Telugus" (cited in: Samanta 2000, 25).
[47] After the Rana regime in Nepal had given formal clearance for recruitment of Gorkhas in British army, from 1846 on recruitment centres were established (Subba 1992, 58). Between 1886 and 1904 about 28,000 Gorkha soldiers were recruited by the Darjeeling recruitment centre (Chatterji 2007, 96). By 1908 about 55,000 soldiers were enlisted in 10 Gorkha regiments (Subba 1992, 58).

Lepcha and the Bhutia. However, the question of Darjeeling's demographic composition *before* the British advent is highly contested in political circles (see Chapter 4).

3.2.2 Culture, language and literature

When in the middle of the 19th century people from today's Nepal migrated to Darjeeling, they did not yet feel as a united "ethnic" group. Rather, they felt affiliated to their different ethnic groups such as Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Mangar, or Gurung each having their distinct languages and culture (Subba 1992, 38)[48]. But since 1850 the growth of multi-group villages required a common language. Various authors stress that the development of Nepali as the *lingua franca* was amongst the most important factors in an ethno-genesis which forged a bond of unity between these different groups (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Kaushik 2013). This process was fostered by the emergence of Nepali literature, journals, and public theatre in Darjeeling since the end of the 19th century, making Nepali a symbol of Nepali nationalism (Chalmers 2009).

At the same time, the new settlement structures also fostered the emergence of a "common culture [...] where each caste or tribe contributed its share and built what we now know as the Nepali society and culture" (Subba 1992, 65). This process entailed a slow erosion of caste-prejudices, and indeed today people in Darjeeling claim that – unlike in Nepal – caste did not play a big role for them[49]. Besides language, Subba emphasises the influence of the Gorkhas' military history on their identity construction (Subba 1992, 56). Together, these processes forged a collective consciousness among the Gorkhas, expressed through an increasingly shared culture, language, and history, which contributed to their identity in positive terms. This ethno-genesis was, however, also paralleled by some exclusionary processes, which many authors hold responsible for establishing the historical roots of the Nepalis' confusion about their position in the Indian state (Chakrabarty 1988; Samanta 2000; Middleton 2010; Sarkar 2013;). I turn to these "negative" definitions of Gorkha consciousness now.

3.2.3 Exclusions and exceptions: British governance and after

Under colonial governance, Darjeeling got the status of "non-regulated area". In 1874 it became a "scheduled district". After the Government of India Act 1919, it was designated as a "backward tract". The Government of India Act in 1935 made it a "partially excluded area". All these

[48] Subba distinguishes between Bahuns, Thakuris, Chhetris, Kamis, Sarkis, and Damais, who had already identified themselves with the term "Nepali", and the other groups (Rai, Limbu, Mangar, Tamang) that started to identify themselves with the term "Nepali" only after the 1920s (Subba, 1992, 38).

[49] Indeed, today weddings across caste and ethnic group are common, although some people I spoke to admitted that marrying a Dalit (member of the lower caste) would be "difficult" and it would take some time for the parents and community to give their blessings.

denominations meant that laws regarding land and land-revenue, especially after 1874 all general laws, were only applied after the explicit permission of the governor of the Bengal Presidency (Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Kaushik 2013). While the 1919 Act allowed for the participation of Indians as elected representatives in governance, Darjeeling's special status entailed that no representative from the area could be send to the Provincial Legislative Council (Bagchi 2012, 86). Only after 1937 Darjeeling was allowed to send representatives to the Bengal Legislative Assembly (Rhodes and Rhodes 2006, 70). Thus, although Darjeeling was politically part of the Bengal Presidency/Province of Bengal since 1866, it was administratively not fully integrated into it up to 1947 (Subba 1992, 36, 37).

The British government's motivation for the exclusionary governance of Darjeeling was probably not only the intention to safeguard the population that was considered as "tribal" from outsiders' exploitation or to secure the huge capital invested by the European tea planters (Samanta 2000, 74) by restricting outsiders from buying land (Bagchi 2012, 85). Samanta (2000, 74) interprets the attempt to foster an ethnic Nepali exclusiveness as a means to oppress the feared Tibetan influence (from the North) on the one hand, and to insulate the population from the rising freedom struggle in Bengal on the other hand.

In discussing the effects of these exceptional rules, Sarkar (2013) argues that colonial governmentality gave people of Darjeeling hills "an early experience of the art of being governed differently" (Sarkar 2013, 42). This implanted the urge for "attaining recognition through privileges, rewards, and protection" which translated into an "aporia of self-rule" (ibid. 44). Similarly, Dyutis Chakrabarty claims that the exceptional rules supported a belief among the Nepalis that their future "would remain safe only under a system of protection and special status" (Chakrabarty 1988, 51).

Ultimately, the British policy of protection through exclusion did not only support the development of a common identity as the Gorkhas. Some authors claim that it also planted the roots for the confused relationship of the Gorkhas with the emerging Indian nation. They argue that the exclusionary policy and the lack of participation in governance hindered the independence movement from spreading to Darjeeling and left the Gorkhas by and large outside of the national mainstream (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000; Kaushik 2013, 40).

This was exacerbated by the role the Gorkhas as soldiers in the British Army played for fighting the freedom struggle. Although some participated in the independence struggle and became martyrs[50], the fact that Gorkha soldiers were employed to subdue the Sepoy Mutini in 1857 and were involved in the massacre at Jalianawalabagh in Amritsar in 1919, where they gunned down hundreds of

[50] Famous martyrs are Major Durga Malla and Dal Bahadur Thapa. Dal Bahadur Giri from Kalimpong became a close aide of Mahatma Gandhi (Bagchi 2012).

unarmed independence fighters has left a strong stigma of the Gorkhas being "stooges" of the British government (Kaushik 2013, 41). Subba (1992) argues that this raised doubts amongst other Indians about the Gorkhas' loyalty to the emerging Indian nation and caused their discrimination, e.g. when travelling within the country. Subba concludes that these experiences have left a "deep sense of insecurity" on the Gorkhas which increased their ethnic consciousness, and their reliance on ethnic solidarity for security (Subba 1992, 61). This ambivalent relation to the Indian nation, and the feeling of being not completely recognised as part of it, translated into what Middleton (2013c, 609) termed "anxieties of belonging". These anxieties are instrumental in understanding the emergence of the Gorkhaland movement in 1980, which I discuss in Chapter 3.4.1 below.

Although Darjeeling's excluded status ended after Independence with its inclusion into the new Union State of West Bengal, the special treatment of the district continued. This is underlined by the formation of a Hill Development Council in 1976 (a government nominated body), the establishment of the autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, and – more recently – the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2012. All these continue the logic of administrative-territorial exceptions (cf. Middleton 2013a). In this context, Sarkar (2013) and Sonntag (1999) claim that instead of addressing these doubts about their recognised Indian identity, the government's post-Independence policy of establishing autonomous councils in Darjeeling has rather added to the Gorkhas' perceived exclusion. Autonomous councils, they claim, continue the colonial exclusionist policy instead of fostering a "we-ness" of Indians (Sonntag 1999, 429).

Also in developmental terms, most people in Darjeeling today perceive the government policy towards their region as discriminative (see Chapter 4). Many people interpret this alleged "internal colonialism" (Bomjan 2008) as an outcome of ethnic discrimination, where a "Bengali" government allocates developmental rewards along ethnic lines and excludes the ethnic minority of the Gorkhas. Subba (1992) sees a direct connection between this perception and an instrumentalisation of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity, he argues, becomes "the only straw that people can hold on to" in order to pressurise the state for a greater share of developmental allocations (ibid. 21 ff.).

This discussion underlines that the Gorkhas' ethnic consciousness is not only defined in positive ways through distinctive characteristics in language, culture, or history, but also negatively, experienced as a lack of belonging to the Indian nation, a lack of a recognised Indian identity, and a lack of development. The feeling of ethnic exclusiveness is thus strongly related to a feeling of ethnically based discrimination.

3.3 Ethnic consciousness, the class-question, and political parties in 20th century Darjeeling

The foregoing discussion displayed accounts, which see the emergence of ethnic consciousness in Darjeeling as resulting from the influence of migratory processes and pre and post-colonial state policy towards the region. Although these approaches are helpful to describe early roots of ethnic consciousness and feelings of discrimination and exclusion, they do not yet explain how ethnic consciousness eventually became a defining trait of people's subjectivities. In this chapter, I explore the role of political parties and organisations in shaping, framing, and spreading ethnic consciousness amongst the masses since the beginning of the 20th century. I show that not only regular demands for administrative separation from (West) Bengal but also demands for recognition of Nepali as official language were instrumental in strengthening this ethnic consciousness. Together, they formed part of the base drawing on which Ghisingh eventually framed the demand of Gorkhaland in 1980. In reviewing this history, I also elaborate on the forms of political competition and popular bases for party-political support. The discussion underlines the comparative diversity of active political parties and the more competitive party-system of pre-1980 and also shows that the discourse around ethnic identity was only one amongst other issues, which mobilised the masses.

3.3.1 Parties and the spread of ethnic consciousness

Significantly, at one time or the other, *all* political parties in Darjeeling (except for the All India Trinamool Congress)[51] have at least once raised the demand for separation from West Bengal, regardless of what they claim today. While most of these demands evolved in response to actual or envisaged political changes at the national level[52] and unanimously stress cultural, linguistic, and geographical differences as bases for justification, they differ considerably regarding the extent and territory of the demanded autonomous administration, and regarding the representative function of those who claim to be the public voice (see time-line, Appendix A).

The earliest demands for administrative separation of Darjeeling were made in 1907 by the Hillmen's Association, which was composed of members of the local elite, who claimed to represent Darjeeling's Nepalis, Bhutia, and Lepcha (Memorandum 1917, cited in: Moktan 2004, 90). Its president S.W. Laden La, a respected police officer and political "middleman" with intimate contacts

[51] The TMC only started activities in Darjeeling district after winning the 2011 elections to the West Bengal Assembly.

[52] The national impetus include the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935; the report of the States Reorganisation Commission in 1955; the Pataskar Commission for hills of Assam in 1965 (which suggested the formation of Hill Areas Councils with separate power and budget); Nehru's Plan emphasising full autonomy of hill people and greater participation in decision making, planning, and administration, and the creation of Meghalaya in 1972 raising hopes for an autonomous State (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000, 28).

to the British administration (Rhodes and Rhodes 2006), stood at the forefront of an exclusionist school in the beginning of the 20th century. Supported by the European Planters and the European Association, the Hillmen's Association expressed the need for "special safeguards" for Darjeeling as a perceived geographically, socially, historically, religiously, and linguistically different area. In face of the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 – the latter granting large measures of autonomy to the provinces and introducing direct elections – they petitioned the government for full administrative separation of the district from the Province of Bengal. In 1917, 1920, and 1929 they proposed the creation of a North-East Frontier Province, comprising today's Darjeeling district, the Dooars, Assam and today's Arunachal Pradesh. Significantly, these demands were opposed by groups (i.e. the Gurkha Memorialists, the Darjeeling People's Association, and the *Kalimpong Samiti*) who feared that Darjeeling would remain backward if further excluded from participation in governance (Kaushik 2013; Middleton 2013a). Instead, they argued that only an inclusion in the regular ambit of administration would allow them to benefit from constitutional reforms (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000, 18), underlining their apprehensions to remain further separated from the Indian mainstream developments. The British government chose a middle path: although it continued with the special status of Darjeeling they never agreed to a complete separation of Darjeeling from the Bengal Presidency. Middleton (2013a) concludes that such internal voices of dissent – which usually lack from popular histories – not only point at the entanglement of articulations of Nepali-Indian identity with state formation. They also show that "this conglomerate identity did not yet have the social or political cohesion it would accrue in later generations" (ibid. 17). Gorkha nationalism – and the discussion about it – was confined to the elite classes only.

This changed in the 1940s, when the emergence of a bourgeois class of small shopkeepers, businessmen, contractors, clerks, teachers, and intellectuals, who were more conscious about their language, sought a forum for interest promotion (Datta 1991, 227). This foresaw the foundation of an ethnic party in Darjeeling, the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) in 1944[53]. Its president D.S. Gurung, a lawyer from Kalimpong, stemmed from a *mandal*[54] family of land-revenue collectors (Sarkar 2010, 96). From the beginning the AIGL had a clear ethnic focus on the Gorkhas only, thereby excluding the Lepcha and Bhutia and signalling the end to the joined struggle of the groups as promoted by S.W. Laden La. The death of Laden La in December 1936 and the subsequent victory of D.S. Gurung in the Provincial elections in 1937 signalled the decline of the Hillmen's Association, which, however,

[53] The party had first been established in 1923 in Dehradun (Subba 1992, 84).

[54] The British had rented out agricultural lands to local *mandals* or revenue-collectors who attained powerful positions in the local community, as they had the capacity to distribute land to new settlers and to realise the land-rent (Sarkar 2010, 94 ff.).

retained its base in Darjeeling till the European Planters left Darjeeling (Lacina 2014, 9). The Lepcha and Bhutia subsequently opened their own associations for the protection of their interests.

The aims of the AIGL were "to fight against the pathetic condition of the Gorkhas spread over India, uncertainty of their political status and their perilous future" (cited in: Subba 1992, 84). This was voiced in demands for recognition as a community, representation in the provincial legislatures and the interim government, and the official recognition of the Nepali language[55]. Expressing fear of Bengali oppression, in 1948 (briefly after Indian Independence and the partition of East (Pakistan) from West Bengal) the AIGL proposed the creation of an autonomous council to secure the proportional representation in State governance of the minority Nepalis, or alternatively the administrative separation from Bengal, and a merger of Darjeeling and Dooars with Assam to form a new province.

D.S. Gurung's speech at a large public meeting in Kalimpong on May 17, 1947, vividly expressed the apprehensions against being part of a Bengali dominated State:

> The Britishers (sic) have treated us like animals but the Bengalis are worse than Britishers. The Bengalis will be our administrators and will try to keep us down all the time. Look how all Government posts have been occupied by these Bengalis although we have got now so many graduates, who can easily replace them. […] [A]ll of you must prepare to face anything and prepare to lay down even your life. I am ready to die for the cause of our people but I will kill ten enemies before I die. (D.S. Gurung, cited in: Singh and Singh 1987, 79)

While the Constituent Assembly was drawing a Constitution for the now independent India, in 1949 at another large public meeting in Darjeeling, the AIGL proposed the creation of an "Uttarakhand" State comprising Darjeeling, Sikkim, Cooch Behar, and Jalpaiguri[56]. The demand was jointly formulated by representatives from the Hillmen's Association and the *Cooch Behar Praja Congress*, along with people from Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and Sikkim. This demand expressed the fear of losing political representation in Bengal, and stressed on the similar "nature and habit", racial characteristics, geographical affinity, and shared history of the people of the envisioned "Uttarakhand" State (Singh and Singh 1987, 87). The Constituent Assembly, however, turned down the demand as they thought such "mischievous moves"[57] could jeopardise national integrity. Discussions on how far this demand reached the common public are controversial. While Subba notes that the Uttarakhand idea received a response beyond the educated people (Subba 1992, 89),

[55] Memorandum to Viceroy Wavell, 1 February 1944 (cited in: Singh and Singh 1987).
[56] At that time, the *Cooch Behar Praja Party* demanded separation from West Bengal for the former Cooch Behar Kingdom. Till date groups in the region demand a separate State of Kamtapur to be carved out of north Bengal, including the areas of Darjeeling district.
[57] From Constituent Assembly of India, reply to starred question No. 658, answered on 15.12.1949 (cited in: Singh and Singh 1987, 94).

Samanta (2000) claims that it "did not find much favour with the people" (ibid. 84)[58]. In 1952, the AIGL sent another memorandum to Prime Minister Nehru proposing three alternative ways of separating Darjeeling from West Bengal[59], yet again without any success.

Initially – presumably as a move to increase its public base in Darjeeling town where the Hillmen's Association was still strong – the AIGL had established ties with the Communist Party in Darjeeling[60]. Although the AIGL had initially stressed its loyalty to the British government, from 1946 onwards it openly lent support to Indian National Congress (INC) and the Quit India resolution (Singh and Singh 1987, 61; Subba 1992, 86). Already in November 1945, the AIGL had openly criticised the deployment of Gurkha troops to beat down the freedom movement in Indonesia and Indo-China, blaming the "imperialists" for befouling their reputation (Singh and Singh 1987, 45, 47)[61]. Such statements express the fear of losing touch with the rest of India, and the experience of discrimination due to the Gorkhas' disputed role in the freedom movement.

In 1946, D.S. Gurung was elected Member of the (Bengal) Legislative Assembly (MLA) on a Congress ticket and subsequently became member of the Constituent Assembly (*ToI*, 27.06.1946)[62]. After his death in 1948, the AIGL's new president Deo Prakash Rai won the MLA seat from Darjeeling sub-division seven times in a row between 1957 and 1977, supported by the electoral alliances of the party with the Congress at the State level (Sarkar 2013).

Although the party had begun with a clear agenda for territorial autonomy and separation from (West) Bengal, after 1956 under the leadership of D.P. Rai its focus shifted to the promotion of Nepali as a recognised language (Chakrabarty 2005; *ToI*, 10.11.1972). There are accusations against D. P. Rai that he had made a secret pact with the government in Calcutta for downplaying the political aspirations of autonomy (Bomjan 2008, 92). Indeed, the close ties between the Congress and the AIGL were underlined by the fact that MLAs from AIGL got seats as Deputy or Cabinet ministers in Congress governments. Further, many erstwhile Darjeeling Congress leaders were either dismissed

[58] Also the Times of India mentions that the "campaign was never taken to a crisis point" (*ToI*, 10.11.1972).
[59] These were: either a separate administrative unit directly under the centre; or a separate province with Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and Sikkim; or the merger of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri with Assam.
[60] Ratanlal Brahmin, leader of the CPI, was vice-president at the general body meeting of the AIGL in March 1944. A note from the Bengal Intelligence Bureau dated January 18, 1944 suspects a strategic move behind this association to establish a stronger base in Darjeeling town (cited in: Singh and Singh 1987, 31).
[61] The memorandum even threatens the British Government: "And the day is coming soon when the Brave Gurkhas shall wreak vengeance upon the Imperialist oppressors for the part they have been forced to play in the black deed of robbing other people's freedom" (November 1945, joint statement of Gorkha Organisations; cited in Singh and Singh 1987, 47).
[62] The Legislative Assembly refers to the State-level parliament. Members are elected every five years on the sub-divisional level. Thus, currently Darjeeling district has four MLAs: for Siliguri, Kurseong, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong sub-divisions.

AIGL members or shared family ties with it (Sarkar 2013)[63]. The AIGL only raised the demand for a separate state again in 1981, after D.P. Rai's death.

The AIGL is regarded as the party which forged the autonomy agenda after Independence, but initially the Communist Party of India (CPI) also joined the choir of demands for separation. Defying the Hillmen's Association's proposal of a merger of Darjeeling and Assam, in 1946 the party proposed the creation of "Gorkhasthan", an independent nation comprising today's Nepal, Darjeeling district, and Sikkim. Supported by the State-level leadership, in 1947 the Darjeeling District Unit of the CPI formulated the demand in a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru (at that time Vice-President of the interim government) and Liaquat Ali Khan (leader of the Muslim League) by claiming that the people of the envisaged country constituted one nation (by sharing geographical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics) and, therefore, had the right to national self-determination. Alternatively, as a remedy for the "backwardness" of people, they suggested a "committee of representatives" with the right to introduce bills be constituted from locals in Darjeeling[64]. The opinions about the CPI's motivations behind the Gorkhasthan demand are divided. While Chakrabarty (2005, 91) sees the ideas as an expression of the Soviet-doctrine of the right to national self-determination, Subba (1992) and Samanta (2000) denote it as a strategy to broaden the public support base of the party beyond the tea-belt against the demand's obvious infeasibility. The communist leaders "knew what would sell in Darjeeling then: not Marxism or Leninism but 'Gorkhalism'" (Subba 1992, 90; see also Samanta 2000, 93). On the contrary, Besky (2013, 78) claims that Darjeeling CPI leader Ratanlal Brahmin did not win the elections to the Provincial Council in 1946 based on an ethnic platform but on a platform that promised the improvement of labour rights.

Yet, in view of the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) committee's visit to Darjeeling in June 1955 (*ToI*, 12.6.55), the CPI revised its stand on Darjeeling and instead advocated "regional autonomy" and the formation of a regional government for Darjeeling as a part of West Bengal (Subba 1992, 91; Samanta 2000, 93), reflecting programmatic changes in the CPI (Brass 1985). Although the SRC did not recommend statehood for Darjeeling, encouraged by its report which stated that new States could be granted based on linguist principle, the AIGL revived the demand for a separate State but the West Bengal government refused even granting regional autonomy fearing

[63] For example, N.B. Gurung, the younger brother of D.S. Gurung, had resigned from the AIGL in 1962 and thereafter served as the president of the Darjeeling District Congress till 1967, before becoming member of the All India Congress Committee in 1972. Under CM B.C. Roy (Congress) he had served as the Deputy Minister of Labour twice. After N.B. Gurung changed parties, Deo Prakash Rai shifted the base of the AIGL from Kalimpong to Darjeeling town (Sarkar 2013).

[64] Memorial of the Darjeeling District Committee of the Communist Party of India, 6.4.1947 (in Samanta 2000, 255).

rumours of a merger with Nepal (Samanta 2000, 85)[65]. At around the same time, in May 1955, the Darjeeling District Congress Committee (DDCC) also joined the demands for autonomy. In 1956 the reorganisation of States in India took place without reflecting these demands. When Nehru visited Darjeeling in 1957, the DDCC, CPI, and AIGL jointly placed a demand for "regional autonomy" (and not statehood) before him (Subba 1992, 91).

Despite the recurrent demands, only in 1967 did the West Bengal Assembly pass a resolution for Darjeeling's regional autonomy. At that time the government was led by the leftist United Front, which included the CPI and the CPI-M among other parties and was supported by the AIGL. Although this development suggests some responsiveness from the government, critiques stress that the resolution did not specify the exact nature and extent of the regional autonomy (Samanta 2000, 94; Subba 1992, 91). Samanta interprets it as an intent to satisfy the AIGL as supporter of the United Front (Samanta 2000, 85). In 1976, resulting from the DDCC initiative, a Hill Development Council was created by the Darjeeling Hill Areas Development Council Act 1976 with the aim to formulate and implement development plans for Darjeeling (Chakrabarty 2005, 183). But contradicting people's demand for a democratic representation (it was headed by the Chief Minister and all its members were government nominated) it soon ceded to disfunctionality (Kaushik 2013; Samanta 2000). After the Left Front was voted into power in West Bengal in 1977, it passed resolutions demanding regional autonomy concerning the three Darjeeling hill subdivisions only and inclusion of Nepali in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution to the Indian government in 1978 and September 1981, yet, without any positive response from the central government.

3.3.2 Beyond party-politics: The language movement

While between 1960 and 1980 the discussion in political circles concerning Darjeeling's status transformed from demands of a full separation from West Bengal in form of statehood to claims for "regional autonomy" under West Bengal, another long-standing demand came to the fore: the demand for the recognition of Nepali as official language in Darjeeling district, and its inclusion in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution[66]. The language movement differed from the autonomy-demands in so far as it had from its beginning a broad cross-party and non-party political base, including various intellectuals and writers (Roy 2012) which underlines its social (in contrast to party-political) character.

[65] Disunity within the AIGL about the separation demand resulted in a rift and the expulsion of 3 MLAs from the party as they refused to end the alliance with the Congress in the West Bengal Assembly (*ToI,* 8.9.55).
[66] Inclusion of a language in the list of the 8th Schedule entitles it to official representation in the Official Languages Commission, and obliges the government to take measures for its promotion.

This language movement[67] attained mass-appeal in the late-1950s, after the West Bengal Assembly turned down the demand of N.B. Gurung (AIGL) and B.B. Hamal (CPI) to recognise Nepali as the official language in Darjeeling. The government justified its rejection with reference to the Census data of 1951 which showed only 26% Nepali-speakers in Darjeeling district, and not the 70% for recognition as recommended by the States Reorganisation Commission (Subba 1992, 94). Claiming that the data were inadequate to demonstrate that Nepali was – if not everybody's mother tongue – the *lingua franca* spoken in the district, all political parties organised large-scale protests in form of demonstrations, strikes, and public meetings, and formed the *Bhasa Manyata Samiti* or Darjeeling District Hill Peoples' Language Implementation Committee in 1961 (Subba 1992, 94 ff.). The agitation convinced the population to name "Nepali" and not their sub-ethnic vernaculars as their mother tongue when asked for the Census. The success of the movement is underlined in the outcome of the next Census, where the share of Nepali speakers suddenly rose to 60 % in the district (ibid.). Subsequently Nepali was included in the West Bengal Official Languages Act 1961 as additional language in the Nepali dominated three hill-subdivisions of Darjeeling district. The Act was, however, only implemented after 12 years.

The language movement then focussed on its second aim, the inclusion of Nepali in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. In 1969, jointly supported by the AIGL and CPI/CPI-M, the *Nepali Bhasa Samiti* (in 1972 renamed *All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti*) was established to "promote and safeguard the interests of the Nepali speaking people" (*ToI*, 10.11.1972). The Darjeeling Congress joined the *Samiti* ahead of Indira Gandhi's visit to the hills in November 1972. Importantly, the *Bhasa Samiti* expressed a conscious effort to keep the agitation for the constitutional recognition of Nepali separate from other political issues like demands for autonomy or a separate state (Samanta 2000, 81).

Accordingly, the senior Darjeeling Congress leader Lorez P.T. Lama described in retrospect the language movement as "social" and not a "political" one. For him "social" meant where "all parties went together", in contrast to "political" party-competitions (interview, 14.6.2013). Thereby he reflected the distinction between a joint cross-party movement and contentious party-politics. This broader language movement as an alliance of political parties and intellectuals had probably a

[67] The earliest phase of the language movement was in the beginning of the 20th century. Fostered by the emergence of Nepali literature and the establishment of the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* in Darjeeling in 1924, initially intellectuals amongst the Nepali-speakers demanded the introduction of Nepali as a medium for instruction at schools and colleges in Darjeeling, which at that time was opposed by the Tibetan speaking Bhutia and Lepcha. Already in 1918 Nepali had been recognised as a vernacular language for examinations by Calcutta University. In 1921 Nepali was introduced as a vernacular subject in Darjeeling Governmental schools. In 1949 the West Bengal Government also recognised Nepali as the medium of instruction in primary, middle, and high schools of Darjeeling district (Samanta 2000).

greater impact on forging ethnic consciousness compared to the autonomy demands (cf. Chakrabarty 2005). The need to convince a majority of people of naming "Nepali" instead of their sub-ethnic vernacular languages as their mother tongue in the 1961 Census contributed to the construction of identities.

Only in 1992, Nepali received constitutional recognition. The delayed government responses further forged this ethnic consciousness. Derogatory comments of Nepali being a "foreign" language by B.G. Kher, the Chairman of the Language Commission in 1956, and again by Prime Minister Morarji Desai in 1979 (Samanta 2000, 81) reminded the Nepalis of their fuzzy status in India, their belonging to an Indian nation questioned due to their historic and cultural associations to Nepal. All this forged a sense of alienation and distrust towards the seemingly unresponsive and insensitive state (cf. Samanta 2000). Neither the establishment of a Hill Development Council in 1976 with its solely nominated body, nor the resolutions passed by the Left Front dominated West Bengal State Assembly for the inclusion of Nepali in the 8th Schedule adopted in 1977 and 1981 could stop this. Instead, people in Darjeeling hills became more aware of their ethnicity and the possibilities to use it politically. This paved the way towards broader political questions including self-determination, ethnic consciousness, and separate statehood (Sarkar 2013, 56).

Although the language movement drew massive support, political mobilisation did not solely happen on the basis of language or ethnicity. This becomes visible in the class-based mobilisation of tea plantation workers to which I turn now.

3.3.3 Plantations and class consciousness

Although the Communist Party of India (CPI) joined the choir of demands for separation from West Bengal, the party focussed more on the creation of class-consciousness than on the ethnic question. While the AIGL drew on ethnically based aspirations for more representation in governance and drew most of its support from the urban educated middle-classes and ex-servicemen, the CPI established its bases amongst plantation workers in the tea and cinchona economy. Five years after its establishment in Darjeeling, in September 1945, the CPI opened the first labour union in Darjeeling. The party forcefully promoted the rights of tea labourers, who till then had been completely unorganised. Workers in the hierarchical plantation system were still totally dependent on the plantation owners for housing, food, and medical care. Workers defying the orders could be evicted from the company leased plantation premises. Agitations including strikes or slow-down in tea plantations were initially oppressed through the police and eviction orders to the ringleaders by the management (Sarkar and Lama 1986, 13). In a 1967 published study, historian Percival Griffith

mentions murder plots of labourers against managers and use of force against those, who refused to join the Union and pay subscription fees (cited in: Sarkar and Lama 1985, 14).

Such agitation was led by the famous Darjeeling communist leader Ratanlal Brahmin (known as *Māilā Bhāje)* who stemmed from an economically weak background. After having worked for the Himalayan Railway and taken up jobs at tea plantations he became active in social issues in Darjeeling. He is described as a man of action who knew "how to deal with the tea garden workers or bully the managers" (Subba 1992, 90). He is also famous for distributing food from looted *godowns* (warehouses) to the starving population during the Bengal famine in 1943 (Bomjan 2008, 94). Subba (1992, 90) states that together with the intellectual Ganeshlal Subba he established communism in Darjeeling.

After Independence, impressed by the spread of the Communist Party in the tea gardens, in the early 1950s the AIGL also established a tea plantation union under the leadership of Deo Prakash Rai and in the early 1960s the Congress party followed suit. At that time, tea garden workers constituted about 60% of the total labour force in the hill areas (Sarkar and Lama 1986, 16). Initially, regardless of inter-party rivalry, the unions cooperated in the struggle for more rights of plantation workers. Strikes and charters of demands were organised jointly (ibid.). For instance, the agitation for more labour rights, which resulted in the shooting of six young workers by the police at Margret's Hope tea estate in 1955, had been jointly organised by AIGL and CPI-M-unions (Bomjan 2008, 107). Also the Maoist uprising in 1967, which began in Naxalbari, a village in the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling, had some effects on the hills and some Naxalite units were installed in the tea plantations although they never gained a considerable base [68].

By 1969 the communists controlled about half of the tea gardens in Darjeeling (*ToI*, 18.8.1969), leaving the rest to the Congress and AIGL unions. Such activities suggest the existence of a labour movement in the tea plantations after Independence. During the Indian emergency between 1975 and 1977 the communists, meanwhile divided into CPI-M and CPI, continued its activities underground[69].

Many elders still remember CPI-M leader and later Chief Minister Jyoti Basu hiding in their tea plantations during that time. Yet, while the trade unions initially jointly fought for the rights of workers, in view of Sarkar and Lama (1986, 34) violent inter-party conflicts including murders

[68] Accounts of Kanu Sanyal, the main initiator of the Naxalite movement, suggest that this was due to a lack of interest and commitment from the communist hill-leaders who preferred a peaceful agitation in line with the policy of the Communist Party (Paul 2014).

[69] After the CPI split into CPI-M and CPI in 1964, both parties continued to exist in Darjeeling district. While the CPI-M was comparably stronger in Kurseong and Darjeeling sub-divisions, the CPI was represented by a prominent leader in Kalimpong (personal communication, R.B. Rai).

underline that these unions degraded to mere political tools for the contending parties, which exploited the labour issues for political advancement instead of promoting the genuine interests of the labourers.

3.3.4 Public support between autonomy, class, and language

This review of socio-political processes in Darjeeling underlines that the ethnic agenda expressed in demands for "regional autonomy" was a prominent (but not the only) programmatic base of political parties in Darjeeling. Since the Hillmen's Association, all proposals stressed on the cultural, geographical, historic, linguistic, and religious differences of people of Darjeeling with the people living in the plains of West Bengal, and claimed that only regional autonomy or a separation from the West Bengal State would secure their representation in government. Thereby, they unequivocally expressed the fear of oppression by the Bengali majority community in terms of governance, business, and state employment. The discussion also suggested that regional claims for autonomy were either influenced through electoral alliances between the regional majority party and the ruling party in West Bengal (e.g. AIGL-Congress), or changed in relation to national party programs (CPI/CPI-M, INC). It is yet not clear in how far the continued reference to the ethnic agenda framed and fostered ethnic consciousness amongst the masses, and in how far they served as explanation for early feelings of discrimination[70]. However, the potential of the ethnic programme in mobilising the masses is underlined through the dominance of the AIGL which emerged as the most powerful party between 1950 and 1980 (as the election results in Table 4 underline).

Yet, the ethnic agenda was not the only programmatic base for parties. Before 1980 there was neither a single-party *hegemony* nor a single-issue (i.e. ethnic) politics in Darjeeling but a more competitive party system was forwarding multiple claims. Despite the dominance of the AIGL, the communists and the DDCC stood their ground, rendering especially the tea plantations highly contested areas as becomes visible in the often violent contestations amongst the parties' labour unions. Unfortunately, existing studies remain largely silent on the question to what extend demands for regional autonomy were indeed a matter of concern for those living and working outside of the urban areas. Accounts of older tea plantation residents suggest that plantation labourers were at least equally concerned with improvement of their working and living conditions instead of engaging for abstract things such as autonomy. Such allegiance to class-struggle is expressed in the labour movement in the 1950s and Naxalite activities in Darjeeling district in the 1970s. Such accounts also suggest that the party-affiliated labour unions played a major role in gaining political support. One

[70] A report in the Times of India titled: "Darjeeling – Cindarella of Bengal" (*ToI*, 12.6.1955) underlines that the mood in Darjeeling at that time was already characterised by a feeling of governmental neglect and discrimination.

elder respondent stressed that local union leaders – regardless of party affiliation – would garner respect and majority support if they were able to successfully argue for improvement of working conditions or workers' promotion to higher positions in the hierarchy. Another remembered that while the AIGL preferred to talk about the rights of the "Gorkhas", the communists stressed on rights of "labours". This points at the availability of both, ethnic and class-consciousnesses. In this context, I argue that the continuous experience of oppression and exploitation at the plantations which were run by non-Nepalis, paired with the labour unions' promotion of new understandings about justice and rights, increased the appeal of the idea of self-rule. This made it easy for Subash Ghisingh to merge class consciousness with ethnic consciousness and frame the problem of economic inequality in terms of ethnic discrimination, making it a powerful device to mobilise the masses. In the next chapter I will show how his forceful promotion of the ethno-regionalist agenda since the 1980s did not only sideline this labour movement but also made the communist party nearly extinct in Darjeeling.

Table 4: Competitiveness of West Bengal Assembly elections from the Darjeeling hill constituencies. Source: Lacina 2014, based on data from the Election Commission

	Darjeeling		Kalimpong		Kurseong/ Jore Bungalow	
Year	**Winner**	**Margin (%)**	**Winner**	**Margin (%)**	**Winner**	**Margin (%)**
1951	AIGL/INC	22	CPI	20	AIGL/INC	44
1957	AIGL	1.1	Independent	16	CPI	6.0
1962	AIGL	24	AIGL	20	CPI	0.60
1967	AIGL	19	INC	10	AIGL	17
1969	AIGL	15	AIGL	15	AIGL	0.86
1971	AIGL	18	AIGL	12	CPI-M	1.5
1972	AIGL	17	INC	5.1	AIGL	3.6
1977	AIGL	11	AIGL	15	INC	0.47
1982*	CPI-M	0.53	AIGL	32	CPI-M	55
1987*	CPI-M	84	CPI	84	CPI-M	15
1991	GNLF	14	GNLF	39	GNLF	17
1996	GNLF	25	GNLF	37	GNLF	30
2001	GNLF	43	GNLF	28	GNLF	28
2006	GNLF	20	GNLF	25	GNLF	60

*Boycotted by GNLF

3.4 Gorkhaland, *chhyāsī*, and the new political regime

Since the late 1950s, the regional parties had scaled down demands for a total administrative separation of Darjeeling from West Bengal to demands for "regional autonomy" under the State which should ensure more representative regional governance. Electoral alliances between the AIGL and the ruling party in the State ensured the party posts in the government. At the beginning of the 1980s, the AIGL and the INC had strong bases in the urban areas, while the CPI-M had built a solid base in the tea plantations through their labour wing (Samanta 2000, 117). Political support bases were, however, shifting. The death of the AIGL's popular president D.P. Rai in 1980, opened the space for other parties to gain ground. Initially, the communists managed to fill the gap and won the national *Lok Sabha* elections in 1980 and 1984, and even the MLA seat for the State Assembly from Darjeeling in 1982. This communist rise, however, was only for a short while, as at the same time new organisations demanding territorial autonomy emerged.

The *Pranta Parisad* was the first organisation to take an uncompromising stand on the creation of a separate State of "Gorkhaland", and, thereby, attracted the more radical youth-wing members of the AIGL (Samanta 2000). It was established in April 1980 (Subba 1992, 87) as a more militant organisation compared to the AIGL. The famous writer Indra Bahadur Rai became the first president and amongst its members were leaders from different parties (including the AIGL, DDCC), members of the language movement, and intellectuals (Roy 2012, 364). In the 1981 memorandum to the Prime Minister the *Parishad* demanded a separate State "comprising of the Nepali speaking region of North Bengal" (memorandum, cited in: Moktan 2004, 143). The organisation however did not manage to garner support outside the urban youth and students (Samanta 2000, 86) and its call for a vote boycott in 1982 did not have much impact[71]. In the 1984 parliament elections, the *Parishad* supported the INC expecting in return its support for the statehood demand. The *Parishad*'s early decline in the mid-80s is attributed to its heterogeneous membership. Nevertheless, it brought the statehood issue back on Darjeeling's political agenda.

In 1986 many active members joined the party that would lead Darjeeling to a violent struggle for Gorkhaland, the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) (Samanta 2000, 86). The GNLF was founded at around the same time as the *Pranta Parishad* but it remained almost unknown in Darjeeling till the mid-1980s (Subba 1992, 187). Its founder Subash Ghisingh, who till today is perceived as one of the most controversial political leaders in Darjeeling, was born in 1936 near Mirik to tea workers. In 1954 he joined the Indian Army, where he got involved in fighting the Naga upsurge in the Northeast of the country. He claims that there he realised the importance of "fighting for a cause" (*ToI*, 1.2.1987,

[71] Except for Kalimpong where only 32% voted.

cited in: Lama 1994, 114). Upon returning to Darjeeling in 1960, besides writing and publishing novels, he got involved in politics. In 1964, he became member of the AIGL youth wing (*Tarun Gorkha*), and later organised the Congress-I affiliated tea workers' union. With his 1968 established *Nilo Jhanda Party* (the "blue-flag" party), he forcefully occupied properties in Darjeeling town (The Week, June 15-21, 1986, cited in: Lama 1994, 38 ff.). In 1977, he unsuccessfully contested elections from Darjeeling constituency. Although Ghisingh, too, was a founding member of the *Pranta Parishad* he left the organisation due to differences with the other leaders and started the GNLF. Initially Ghisingh sent letters and memoranda demanding Gorkhaland to the head of states of India, Nepal, Britain, and the United Nations, giving his demand an international dimension from the beginning. Initial calls to boycott the municipal and parliamentary elections between 1980 and 1984 did not receive much response, and only since 1985 the CPI-M led government paid more attention to him (Samanta 2000, 116).

I now display the factors which helped Ghisingh to ascend to a powerful, loved, and equally feared leader for the next decades.

3.4.1 Gaining majority

Ghisingh is certainly a grown politician. The fact that he more or less started the GNLF from scratch and to make it a majority party against the established Congress, AIGL, and CPI/CPI-M in Darjeeling underlines his impressive capability to mobilise people. A review of studies on the '86 agitation uncovers four factors that help explaining the public appeal of the GNLF: (i) the argumentative framing of the statehood demand, (ii) Ghisingh's vocal strength and style of leadership, (iii) the organisational strength of the GNLF including its ability to reach out to the grassroots, and (iv) the violent intimidation of rivals and dissenting voices. I argue that together, these factors did not only make the GNLF to a dominant party but also made Gorkha ethnicity a defining trait of people's subjectivities. In reviewing the GNLF's rise to and maintenance of its power, I draw on the initially introduced strategies for ruling in competitive authoritarian regimes (i.e. legitimacy, co-optation, repression) (see Chapter 1).

Framing Gorkhaland and vocal strength

The *Pranta Parishad* and the GNLF were both established at a time when the economic decline in the tea plantations including the closure of gardens[72], labour unrest and unemployment (Datta 1991) added to people's grievances. These were exaggerated by comparisons to the northern State of Sikkim (what Subba (1989, 114) termed "transferred jealousy"). In 1975, the former Kingdom of Sikkim had become part of the Indian Union and – supported by generous financial support of the

[72] Twelve of the 84 plantations had remained closed for long.

central government – observed a rapid development. In contrast, in Darjeeling the perceived nepotism in government hiring practices privileging Bengalis and the lack of employment opportunities forced educated Gorkha youth to migrate to the plains in search of work. Unemployment also entailed social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse. All this added to environmental degradation. The West Bengal government appeared to be "remote, opaque and unaccountable to the local people in Darjeeling" (Ganguly 2005).

In addition to this economic crisis, in 1979–80, news of the expulsion of ethnic Nepalis from Assam and Manipur reached Darjeeling. This and the inaction of the West Bengal government in this issue sparked fears of possible evictions from Darjeeling, too. It reminded the Gorkhas of their insecure position vis-à-vis the Indian state expressed in doubts over their recognised national belonging and citizenship (Datta 1991; Dasgupta 1999; Ganguly 2005). Despite being Indian citizens, they were afraid that due to their relations to Nepal they, too, could be evicted. Ghisingh emerged as a leader during this perceived crisis, which created insecurity in both, political and socio-economic terms.

Ghisingh's argumentative clue lay in the way he combined the statehood demand with the citizenship and identity issue that it played upon such fear and uncertainty of the Nepalis (Samanta 2000, 113). He suggested that the Gorkhas' interests were no longer safe with the West Bengal government (Datta 1991, 228). Thus, while the *Pranta Parishad* still formulated the demand for statehood in terms of political representation, Ghisingh addressed people's fears of being branded as "foreigners" and of disownment (Subba 1992, 101; Samanta 2000, 117). He gave the Nepali's feeling of insecurity and doubts of national belonging, which had lingered upon them since the colonial time, a new frame in terms of an "identity crisis", and blended it with the ethno-regional agenda. He established the myth that only a separate State could give the Gorkhas their "Indian identity".

Generally, the "identity crisis" describes the Gorkhas' perceived stigmatisation as citizens of Nepal and lack of recognition as genuine Indian citizens. This perception translates into fears of possible eviction from their home. Middleton (2013b) describes such "anxieties of belonging" as expressions of "people seeking, yet perennially denied, their place in the nation state", and as "collective embodiments" of crisis and uncertainty (ibid. 609).

Ghisingh identified the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Nepal and India as the core reason for the confusion about national belonging. This bilateral treaty allows citizens of India and Nepal both to travel to the other's country and conduct business without needing a visa. Ghisingh (and also today's advocates of Gorkhaland) argued that this unrestricted movement and settlement of the linguistically and ethnically similar Nepalese citizens in India (and Darjeeling) created confusion about the Indian Gorkhas' nationality, and gave the impression that they, too, were from Nepal.

Accordingly, he advocated for an abrogation of the treaty. Contrary to attempts of the Indian government and the media to couch the Gorkhaland demand in terms of developmental grievances, Ghisingh prioritised these identity-issues and clearly denied any "economic content". In the August 1986 issue of the popular Indian journal *Frontline*, he clarified:

> We don't want any 'hill development'. We don't want our roads to be paved with gold. [...] We are prepared to go hungry but we are determined to have Gorkhaland. […] Our voice is not against any economic mismanagement of allocated funds or for more money or for creation of more jobs. We demand Gorkhaland to ensure and protect our Indian identity. (Subash Ghisingh in Frontline 1986, August, cited in: Lama 1994, 52)

The utilisation of humorous local idioms in speeches, the blending of "somewhat superstitious beliefs with clever distortions of history" (Samanta 2000, 114), and his "mystic touch" helped Ghisingh to spread his message and gain respect amongst the masses (ibid.). More worldly promises also had an appeal to the populace, including the assurance that the problem of unemployment would be resolved if Gorkhaland became a reality. This, especially, appealed to the unemployed youth who believed that the dominance of "outsiders" in governmental positions and other higher positions was a hurdle for getting jobs (Timsina 1992, 54, 60). Thus, the GNLF built a strong base amongst the emerging non-urban educated middle-classes of the district (Subba 1989, 138).[73]

Organisational strength and intimidation

To spread his message Ghisingh engaged in intense work at the grassroots level. The establishment of local units and the distribution of recordings of his speech held on 2.6.1985 in Kurseong town in forms of cassettes allowed Ghisingh to reach each and every settlement in the hills and had a remarkable effect on mobilisation (Samanta 2000, 117; Kidan Lepcha, interview, 21.4.2012). After 1985, frontal organisations including labour unions and women's wings united different categories of followers under the single thread, the demand for Gorkhaland (Sarkar 2013, 69)[74]. One of them, the Gorkha Volunteers' Cell (GVC) led by Chattrey Subba, who later became one of Ghisingh's rivals, became the underground militant force of the party[75]. Financially, the party was supported by donations from rich Nepalese merchants and "donations" (taxes) from households (Kaushik 2013, 63) as well as by the tea planters who hoped to break the communists' unions (Besky 2013, 145). Some

[73] This rhetoric was expressed in Ghisingh's public speeches as well as on posters saying: "We are stateless. We are constitutionally tortured all over India. We want our administration, return our land from Bengal. Our future is in great danger. It is better to die than to live as a slave. All are, therefore, required to fight for Gorkhaland" (cited in: Datta 1991, 228).

[74] These were the Gorkha National Women's organization (GNWO), Gorkha National Youth Front (GNYF), Gorkha National Students' Front (GNSF), Gorkha Volunteers' Cell (GVC), Gorkha Liberation Welfare Organisation (GWOP), and Gorkha National Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GNEO) (S. Sarkar 2013, 69).

[75] Rumours have it that its activists undertook training with militant groups of the North East such as the United Liberation Front of Assam, National Socialist Council of Nagaland, and People's Liberation army of Mizoram (Datta 1991, 230).

claim that Ghisingh received considerable financial support from the Nepalese government that allegedly used the uproar to ignore Indian government's pressure regarding the *Madheshi* settlers in the Nepalese Terai (Dasgupta 1999; Kaushik 2013; Bagchi 2012)[76]. Others believe that the GNLF was sponsored by the INC in order to create unrest in the Left Front-led West Bengal State (Kohli 1997b) thus using the movement as a political tool in the struggle for electoral majorities (Subba 1992; Ganguly 2005).

The GNLF's black-flag demonstration on 5.4.1986 that drew an immense following marked the beginning of the violent agitation (or *chhyāsī* in people's political time). The display of *khukurīs* (long Gorkha knifes) functioned as a symbol for violent retaliation (Dasgupta 1999, Samanta 2000, 118) and reminded of the colonial ascriptions of the *vīr* (brave) Gorkha. In addition, *bandhs* (general strikes), election, and tax boycotts were clearly directed against the State government (Samanta 2000, 119)[77]. The GNLF's anger was mainly directed against the members of the CPI-M in Darjeeling who opposed the demand for Gorkhaland. This rendered the tea plantations, where the communists had a considerable hold, battle zones between pro and anti-Gorkhaland forces. Those, who did not surrender, saw their houses burned and many had to flee the hills (Subba 1992). Even doubts about one's political affiliation could become a question of life and death. The GNLF also called for "social boycotts" of rivals, a practice of complete social isolation from the community which strangles livelihoods in the close-knit interdependent society (Kaushik 2013, 62)[78]. Importantly, Subba describes how ideological as well as personal grievances and distrust between the former AIGL/Congress and communist members played a role in the degree of violence (Subba 1992, 149). Once, the AIGL's influence began to wane in Darjeeling, CPI-M cadres, who had been looked down upon as "illiterates" and "idiots", began to treat the Congress and AIGL supporters in similar terms (Subba 1992, 126). Subba also points at social stratifications across the hill society, including divisions between urban and rural areas, between the sub-divisions, and between villages, expressing notions of superiority and inferiority (ibid. 150), which underlines that the Gorkhas – even in 1986 – were far from being a united community.

The GNLF increasingly established its authority and even created its own "Gorkha Police Force", which acted as the law enforcing authority of Ghisingh's unofficial government (Sarkar and Bhoumik 2000, 33). GNLF orders became binding on government employees and transport operators (ibid.).

[76] *Madhesi* refers to ethnically Indian Nepalese citizens residing in the lower lands of Nepal. They are often accussed to be Indian and not Nepalese citizens by other Nepalis.
[77] The 72-hours *bandh* called by the GNLF in May 1986 observed an outburst of violence between CPI-M and GNLF supporters (Ganguly 2005). The police firing at GNLF demonstration in Kalimpong on 27.7.1986, where the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty was burned, added fuel to the circle of attacks and counter-attacks (Subba 1992).
[78] Socially boycotted persons were refused transport, support during social events such as weddings or funerals, and shops would not sell goods to them.

Elected representatives to local and district level governmental bodies resigned (Sarkar and Bhoumik 2000, 34). The GNLF did not only levy taxes on Darjeeling's residents but from May 1988 also urged each family to give at least one male member for their do-or-die struggle (Samanta 2000; Kaushik 2013, 63).

3.4.2 State response

Meanwhile, the CPI-M-led West Bengal State government became more responsive to the increasing mobilisation in the hills. In 1985, Darjeeling's Member of Parliament (MP) Ananda Pathak introduced a private member bill in the Parliament demanding regional autonomy for Darjeeling. But the fact that the bill was from the beginning determined to fail due to the majority relations in the Parliament only increased the perception amongst the Nepalis that the government was not treating them honestly (Subba 1992). Faced with the violence and the increasing GNLF influence, the State government called paramilitary forces (i.e. the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force, and the State Armed Police). The period from November 1986 until April 1987 was characterised by a countermovement spearheaded by the state-backed CPI-M activists (Sarkar 2013, 73). To counter the GNLF, they established camps with the support of nearby police posts in strategic locations, including Sonada, Chongtong in Pulbazaar, Margret's Hope, and Ringtang tea estates (Samanta 2000, 128), places that till today have a considerable communist following. It is this period which people commonly associate with *chhyāsī,* full of horrible memories of rape, murders, beheaded bodies, nightly police raids, and hardship due to the limited mobility and lack of food supplies.

Only after June 1987 (Sarkar 2013) both the State and the central governments took a more accommodating approach towards the movement. Ghisingh was called for talks to Delhi in January 1987, and the idea of a solution of the conflict through the establishment of an autonomous council was first introduced in September of that year. It would, however, take one more year of violent agitation topped by a 40-day-long *bandh* until an agreement was signed in August 1988, paving the way for the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). This was protested by the militant factions within the GNLF, also because none of the demanded areas in the Dooars was included under the council. The issue of the Gorkhas' Indian citizenship was, however, not completely forgotten, as Ghisingh pursued PM Rajiv Gandhi to notify the citizenship of all Indian Gorkhas, who had come to India prior January 26, 1950[79]. Many authors accuse both the centre and the State governments for their late

[79] The Gazette notification (23.8.1988) reads: "every Gorkha who was domiciled in the territories that on 26 January 1950 […] became the territory of India […] and who was either born in that territory or had been ordinarily resident in that territory for not less than five years before the commencement of the Indian Constitution shall be a citizen of India" (cited in: Ganguly 2005, 489, 499).

response to the movement, alleging them of utilising it for their political manoeuvres (Datta 1991; Subba 1992; Samanta 2000; Ganguly 2005).

3.4.3 Dissent and fractures

During the agitation the communists were the only group that openly opposed Ghisingh. Other groups, including the *Pranta Parishad*, the AIGL and the DDCC, soon lend their support to Ghisingh, although the DDCC suggested the creation of a Union Territory instead of a separate State in May 1988 (Subba 1992, 176). The GNLF activists mainly consisted of unemployed youth and ex-servicemen, underlining the militant direction while intellectuals were ousted after they started raising soft critique against Ghisingh's line of action (Samanta 2000, 120; Subba 1992, 34). Ghisingh held unlimited power to make or unmake any committees (including district and local village committees) (Samanta 2000; 119) and regularly reshuffled the party ranks (ibid. 130). His agreement on the DGHC, however, did not go unchallenged within the party, and splits emerged between the more militant and modest factions[80].

Chattrey Subba whose GVC had become an own organisation in the GNLF, and C.K. Pradhan – both from Kalimpong – openly challenged Ghisingh in the DGHC elections. Also the masses did not seem to be satisfied with Ghisingh. At a meeting in Kalimpong in November 1989, he was openly criticised when he – meanwhile elected DGHC chairman and entitled to State security – appeared accompanied by the hated CRPF forces. Subba (1992, 192) concluded: "He was not really the leader the people had in mind. The masses supported the demand, not Ghisingh, and the issue but not him".

3.4.4 *Chhyāsī* and a culture of silence

In retrospect, the GNLF movement did not only bring the demand of statehood to the national agenda and resulted in the granting of an autonomous council for the three hill-subdivisions. It also established the social, cultural, and political bases for the single-party hegemony which continues till today: First, the movement succeeded in installing a firm belief that only a separate State could address the perceived political and socio-economic crises, expressed in anxieties about recognised national belonging/citizenship, and developmental grievances. The main aspect of this was the formulation of the "identity crisis" which till 1980s was merely an undercurrent but not yet outspoken and was brought into a direct relationship with the idea of a separate State and the citizenship question. Ghisingh connected these issues through a new frame of Gorkhaland which was

[80] Some of the militant leaders had sizable armed underground followings (Samanta 2000, 120) and their conflicts were mirrored in turf-wars over towns. Kalimpong for instance was divided into GNLF and GVC camps in the East and the West of the town (Subba 1992, 144).

so appealing as an explanation for problems and as a solution that people accepted the tyranny of *bandhs*, violence, and the silencing of their voices. Ghisingh designed Gorkhaland as a powerful normative frame which helped him legitimise his authority.

Second, in line with the idea of Gorkhaland, ethnic identity gained a prime position as the defining trait of people's subjectivities. This ethnic consciousness combined both, positive formulations (in terms of distinct culture, language, braveness) and negative formulations (as lack of governmental recognition, developmental backwardness). Reference to the image of the *vīr* (brave) Gorkha helped Ghisingh to mobilise the masses in the fight against perceived ethnic-based government discrimination. The emphasis on ethnic identity, coupled with a fight against the statehood-opposing members of the CPI-M eventually subsumed class-consciousness in the tea plantations and tied demands for labour justice and rights to the overshadowing idea of ethno-regionalism (cf. Chettri 2013). Thereby the Gorkhaland dream sidelined any alternative solutions for people's grievances, and ways to negotiate demands with the state. Against this background it is not surprising that the tea-labour question (not to be confused with the problem of unemployment or other developmental grievances) never figured in any GNLF programmes or the DGHC agreement (cf. Besky 2014, 170). Instead, the GNLF-agitation established an anti-communist mood which prevails in Darjeeling till today.

The sidelining of the labour or other alternative discourses was supported through the violent silencing of dissenting voices. Social boycotts, and the experience of violence, rape, and murder committed by both sides in the conflict, instilled what some in Darjeeling call a "fear psychosis". This nurtured the belief that only belonging to the majority would ensure peace and personal security. People's apprehensions towards multi-party villages, which I often discovered during my field work, clearly express the (experienced) equation of multi-party system and violence. Subba describes this silencing with the term "chorused thinking": if one party "says something the followers seldom dispute among themselves and seldom allow others to dispute the sacred truth" (Subba 1992, 15). Although Ghisingh had announced that once Gorkhaland was attained, all parties could openly practise their ideologies (Subba 1992, 127), the GNLF objected the participation of other political parties in the DGHC polls (Kaushik 2013, 139). This underlines its approach of leaving no space for any opposition (ibid. 178) (see Chapter 3.5). Samanta notes that the movement turned out to be a means to "terrorise people into submission and for liquidating the opponents" (Samanta 2000, 135). The term *chhyāsī* in political time expresses these memories of violence and hardship endured during the agitation, which remain part of the collective memory in Darjeeling till today.

Thus, it is the totality of the ethnic Gorkhaland discourse in people's subjectivities combined with violent oppression through the dominant party, which paved the way for the establishment of the

firm dominant-party regime in Darjeeling hills. As I will show in the next section, after the establishment of the DGHC in 1988 this regime would be sustained through the active support of the West Bengal government.

3.5 *Ghisinghko pālo* and institutionalised authoritarianism

The tripartite agreement between the GNLF, the West Bengal State, and the central government on the DGHC was signed in August 1988. The first elections to the autonomous council covering Darjeeling hill sub-divisions were held in December. Despite the internal critiques and the public disappointment, the GNLF won 26 of the 28 seats of the council. The remaining seats were taken by the CPI-M[81]. The council was given authority over various areas including agriculture, public health, sanitation, hospitals, tourism, public works, roads, transport, water, and education (Kaushik 2009). The remaining areas, including the economically important tea and timber remained under the control of the State government and continued to be implemented by the District Magistrate. Yet, the total financial dependence on the State and central governments, and the lack of any legislative power, entailed questions of the council's *de facto* autonomy. A third of the members was nominated (Chakrabarty 2005). In view of these shortcomings, some claim that the DGHC had barely more powers than a district-level *zilla parishad* (see Chapter 1) (Subba 1992, 189; Ganguly 2005, 497). Politically, though, the DGHC entailed drastic changes concerning the bases of political authority, structures of governance, and the GNLF leaders' relation to the State government.

Ghisingh had to transform from a leader of an armed agitation to an elected representative. Instead of violently fighting the state, the council agreement forced him to cooperate with the previous enemy. And instead of deriving his legitimacy from promoting a radical ethno-regional agenda, he now had to deliver on the developmental front. How did Ghisingh manage to rule for the coming 20 years? Drawing on a combination of studies on the DGHC with accounts of interviews, I show that different forms of repression and political patronage were as crucial as the support of the State government.

3.5.1 Soft and hard repression

The establishment of the council forced the GNLF leaders to derive their legitimacy from the successful distribution of welfare and employment instead of drawing on the normative Gorkhaland demand. In other words, they had to compensate their loss of normative legitimacy (based on the

[81] The two CPI-M constituencies were Bijanbari and Rishiheat, places that till today are regarded as part of the "red belt" in Darjeeling.

Gorkhaland demand) by investing in factual measures (cf. Karateke 2005). This was difficult, as since the GNLF foundation Ghisingh had based his rhetoric on the issue of the Gorkhas' Indian citizenship and identity only, and defied attempts of the national government and media to couch it in developmental terms. But instead of providing promised "swimming pools on the roofs" and "streets of gold", as people recall, the DGHC's reign was characterised by corruption scams, the failure of envisaged projects, and the incapability of the council to address pressing problems such as water supply and unemployment (Ganguly 2005).

Thus, instead of garnering factual legitimacy (cf. Karateke 2005), various studies and accounts underline how Ghisingh began to utilise the council as a means for soft repression. The DGHC facilitated the institutionalisation of so-called "money power" and political patronage[82]. Ghisingh used the council to issue developmental contracts to hand-selected party activists and contractors who formed the new elite. He also stabilised his presidential position through selecting candidates to contest the elections for councillor-positions in the DGHC. Ghisingh himself held a firm position at the top-end of this clientelist hierarchy and was regularly criticised for his "one-man decisions" (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013). Various accounts suggest that rivals or those who did not obey orders were excluded from the benefits, rendering development a disciplinary tool for controlling space and people, a practice I explore in relation to the GJM in Chapter 6.

Ghisingh's orders even concerned the religious and cultural realms. In the early years of the new millennium, Ghisingh developed the idea of "upgrading" the DGHC by bringing its area under the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution. This guarantees constitutional safeguards for autonomy for areas with a predominantly "tribal" population (see Chapter 4). At that time, Darjeeling, however, only had a recognised tribal population of 32 per cent (Middleton 2010, 35). As part of his campaign to make Darjeeling appear "tribal", supported by the culture department of the DGHC, Ghisingh began to promote non-Hindu forms of worship. For instance, he ordered the worshipping of Godess Mahakali instead of others (speech 17.12.2006, at Norbong tea estate), or the worship of a *shīlā* (a stone) instead of an idol of Godess Durga during *Dashain* or *Durga Puja.* Usually, Hindus worship an idol of the Godess during this major festival (see Middleton 2010, 171 for a detailled discussion).

Unsurprisingly, the bases of public support and tolerance of the GNLF's political authority changed. While veterans of the '86 movement stress that they had initially followed Ghisingh because of their emotional attachment and belief in the demand, people now obeyed his orders out of obligation:

[82] R.B. Rai, president of CPRM, claims that the DGHC marks a change in hill politics because it instrumentalised the use of "money power" – which had played a less important role in Darjeeling's politics previously. He claims that prior to that people supported political parties rather based on their ideologies and beliefs, and less due to intimidation and financial spoils (interview, 11.6.2013).

"Being with the party was the only way to make a life in the hills" (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013). Some expected personal benefits; others feared political victimisation such as losing their jobs, exclusion from state benefits, or "social boycott". This suggests that with the help of the council Ghisingh established a "punishment regime" (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010, 128), which helped him to sustain the party organisation while sustaining his top-position.

Studies show that the participation of common people in the political decision making processes was further impeded by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992. This dissolved the three-tier *panchayati raj* system in Darjeeling and only left the *gram panchayats* as elected bodies (albeit equally controlled by the GNLF) (Ganguly 2005, 495) (see Chapter 1.2). Further, conflicts of jurisdiction between the DGHC and the *panchayati raj* sphere led to a complex working agreement with the district administration. Chakrabarty (2005) comments that the resulting top-down approaches made people "passive recipients of development aid" (ibid. 187). Unsurprisingly, people in Darjeeling have a very tense relation to the promise of "development".

Such means of soft repression were combined with the hard repression of rivals. To oversee the GNLF constituencies, and to make sure that any form of opposition was oppressed, Ghisingh invested loyal strongmen with power: "Whoever could flex most muscle either by giving money or through intimidation" (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013) was nominated as DGHC councillor. Also political murders such as that of C.K. Pradhan in 2002 – allegedly carried out on Ghisingh's order – were never solved. Former GVC chief Chattrey Subba got arrested in 2001, after his alleged involvement in a murder attempt on Ghisingh and was only released from jail in 2011, after Mamata Banerjee (TMC) had become the new Chief Minister[83].

The fear of victimisation paired with the heavy dependence on GNLF strongmen and councillors for gaining access to state benefits, jobs, and contracts accentuated the "politics of silence" (Chakrabarty 2005, 193) which had started during the 1986 agitation and remains part of Darjeeling's political culture till today. As I show in the next section, all this could not work without the silent consent of the CPI-M led West Bengal government, which channelled the DGHC funds.

3.5.2 The state and the leader

Initially, the relations between the CPI-M led State government and Ghisingh had been icy. Ghisingh criticised the slow transfer of departments to the DGHC and the delay of funds. To put pressure on the government he even designed some conspiracy theories, for example he claimed that some

[83] Rumours claim that Chhatrey Subba was a secret West Bengal "crack force" leader, used by CPI-M in opposition to GNLF (Subba 1992, 146).

"forces" in Darjeeling were attempting the creation of a "Greater Nepal", or declared Darjeeling a "no-man's land" (Sarkar 2013). This latter theory claims that Darjeeling lacks a constitutional inclusion into the Indian nation state, and proclaims the Gorkhas as the only rightful rulers of the district. Drawing on this claim Ghisingh justified a boycott of the 1994 *panchayat samiti* elections (Sarkar 2013, 86). At other times he revived the demand for Gorkhaland (e.g. prior the *gram panchayat* elections in 2000) and kept hopes for an upgrade of the council to full statehood alive (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013). Such campaigns resulted in the three-times amendment of the DGHC Act or even the withholding of *panchayat* elections (Sarkar 2013; Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000). In 1998 another call to boycott the *Lok Sabha* elections paved the way for the CPI-M to win the seat from Darjeeling constituency (Sarkar and Bhaumik 2000, 130). A journalist recalled that after some time the State government and Ghisingh seemed to have found a working balance and eventually, the government allowed Ghisingh to rule Darjeeling as to his whims and hardly interfered anymore in the council's businesses.

Various critical accounts suggest that "money" and "muscle power" became the state approved means allowing Ghisingh and the GNLF to rule. Despite poll-irregularities, intimidation of rival candidates, political murders and signs of wide-spread corruption, only once (in 1992) an independent audit of the DGHC was conducted (Lacina 2014). Niraj Lama recalled that the government gave the impression that Ghisingh alone was the recognised representative of Darjeeling: "Nobody dared to speak against somebody so well endorsed by Delhi and Kolkata" (interview, 14.5.2013). Secrecy rather than transparency became a means to rule (ibid.). Lacina (2014) contends that the government used the autocracy to create stability and oppress any demands for autonomy. Chakrabarty (2005) concludes that it turned a "deaf ear" and shut "its eyes" (ibid. 193) to "buy[s] peace by abdicating its constitutional obligations" (ibid. 189). Ghisingh and his henchmen became brokers of the West Bengal government, which was not able to rule without them. The DGHC institutionalised the relatively loose working relationship that had existed between the State government and the ruling regional party in Darjeeling in form of electoral pacts prior to the 1980s.

This conclusion is supported by an account of CPI-M leader, and former minister-in-charge of Hill Affairs (later Urban Development minister) Ashok Bhattacharya, previously a major antagonist of Ghisingh. In an interview he acknowledged that Ghisingh's style of functioning was "completely authoritarian". But he added that "if we don't give him support then this DGHC would be broken. Then again the demand for a separate State of Gorkhaland might have started" while pointing to the fact that after all Ghisingh was "elected" (interview, 9.7.2012).

Yet, faced with decreasing public support – becoming visible in worsening election results to the DGHC in 1994 and 1999[84] and the murder attempt – Ghisingh managed to withhold the scheduled elections to the DGHC in 2004. Instead, in 2005 the State government appointed him as "caretaker" while leaving the next date for elections unknown[85]. This apparently "unholy alliance" between Subash Ghisingh and the State government alienated those who had fought for Gorkhaland in *chhyāsī* even more. All this deepened the feeling of betrayal amongst Darjeeling's population, giving rise to the anti-incumbency which eventually led to Ghisingh's downfall.

3.5.3 Resistance

Despite the authoritarianism of GNLF and its seeming total control, two forms of a new opposition emerged. The first concerns other regional political parties that formed an anti-Ghisingh alliance. At its forefront stood Madan Tamang who openly challenged Ghisingh by denouncing him as a betrayer of people's aspirations and by accusing him of corruption. In 1992, he established the Gorkha Democratic Front (GDF) which later merged with the AIGL making Tamang its new president.

In another remarkable development, in response to the Indian Prime Minister's (PM) announcement to give in to the demand of Uttarakhand State from Uttar Pradesh, in 1996 district leaders of the CPI-M de-linked from their party. Demanding the creation of Gorkhaland, they established the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM) (Bomjan 2013, 22). The communists still had a considerable (albeit silent) following in Darjeeling, and at the time of my field work the CPRM was regarded the second strongest party in the hills (*TT*, 3.5.2012). While this break-away CPI-M was campaigning for Gorkhaland in Darjeeling, Ghisingh prohibited newspapers from covering these events, and reiterated the claim that Darjeeling was a historical "no-man's land" (Bhomjan 2013, 50 ff.). Together with the AIGL, the GDF, and the DDCC, the CPRM became part of the Gorkhaland People's Front (GPF) which campaigned for a broad-based movement for Gorkhaland, a claim rejected by Ghisingh (Sarkar 2013, 87). Despite the increasing antipathy towards Ghisingh none of the regional opposition parties managed to mobilise sufficient support to de-thrown him. This suggests that either the public uproar was still too weak or people were simply too scared.

The second form of opposition challenged Ghisingh rather indirectly. From the beginning of the 1990s on, various ethnic sub-groups began to stress and rediscover their distinct origin, language, and culture as a means to demand recognition as Scheduled Tribes. Such recognition is part of an Indian affirmative action policy which guarantees members of the group preferential treatment in

[84] In 1999 the GNLF won 23 out of the 28 DGHC constituencies.
[85] Ashok Bhattacharya claims that elections in 2005 were withheld as negotiations for the 6th Schedule were going on at that time (interview, 9.7.2012). An amendment of the DGHC Act in 1994 allowed the State government to legally establish a non-elected caretaker (Sarkar 2013, 83).

the allotment of government jobs or access to higher education besides special welfare schemes. They sidelined their Gorkha identity which was instrumental for the demand of Gorkhaland (Middleton and Shneiderman 2008; Middleton 2010) and organised themselves in (sub-)ethnic organisations. This process of ethno-reversal intensified after 2005, when Ghisingh had – probably in an attempt to stop the public uproar– secretly signed a deal with the central and State governments to bring Darjeeling under the 6th Schedule. Although this grant constitutionally guaranteed autonomy under the State government for tribal-dominated areas, the proposed bill initiated fears amongst non-tribal groups to be excluded from benefits (Economic and Political Weekly 2007; Middleton 2010). Though it was intended to sustain his rule, the 6th Schedule proposal eventually signalled the end of Ghisingh's reign.

In October 2007 a new party emerged, which did not only succeed in stopping the 6th Schedule bill but also in putting an end to Ghisingh's and the GNLF's rule. Proclaiming a "democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian" agitation, Ghisingh's former DGHC councillor and aide Bimal Gurung revived the demand for Gorkhaland and announced a new form of politics in Darjeeling hills, giving expression to the long-standing public grievances (more on this in Chapter 5).

3.6 Conclusion

The reviewed phases of "political time" in Darjeeling reflect respondents' political inflection of long-term time-reckoning. The discussion of these phases indicated changes in governance as well as changes in style of leadership and forms of ruling. For instance, senior Darjeeling Congress leader Lorez P.T. Lama contrasted the "sincere" leaders before the 1980s, who would involve in social work for the people while maintaining their *guṇ* (quality, virtue, merit) with leaders after the agitation, who were "selfish" and were involved in corruption and did not work for their communities (interview, 14.6.2013).

Indeed, before 1980s, Darjeeling's political regime was characterised by a relatively competitive multi-party system. Despite the dominance of the Gorkha ethnic AIGL, also the communists, who were drawing on class-consciousness, and the INC stood their ground. This and the regular agitation for labour rights underline that the ethnic agenda was not the only programme, which mobilised the masses. Rather, discussions about ethnicity seemed to be initially confined to some elite circles, before the establishment of the AIGL signalled the spread of the agenda to the middle-classes. Yet, only the cross-party and non-party-based language movement spread the awareness about the ethnic belonging to the "Gorkhas" to the general masses and disclosed the potential of ethnically

based mobilisation for achieving political aims. This awareness was strengthened by the rather unresponsive state policy towards Darjeeling.

This awareness, coupled with the experience of political and socio-economic crises, provided the pre-dispositions based on which Subash Ghisingh framed the demand of Gorkhaland since 1980. His skilled interconnection of the statehood demand with issues of citizenship and existential security-concerns made Gorkhaland a powerful vision presented as a solution to all problems. It also made ethnic consciousness the defining trait of people's subjectivities while subsuming the class-consciousness and the labour question. Gorkhaland became the only demand towards the state, and the GNLF its sole voice. Subash Ghisingh derived his normative legitimacy from being the single embodiment of this vision. In this process, also other Gorkha parties including the AIGL were largely sidelined. The GNLF initiated the movement for Gorkhaland and then monopolised it.

Importantly, this marginalisation of rival voices was supported through the use of force. This had serious implications for the political regime in Darjeeling, which was institutionalised through the establishment of the DGHC. A dominant-party regime was established. The use of repression and political patronage became regular means of control to make up for Ghisingh's loss of normative legitimacy after his perceived rollback on the ethno-regional agenda. The politics of identity was replaced by the "politics of intimidation" (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013). Together, this lead to what many call a "fear psychosis" expressed in commonly shared apprehensions towards multi-party competition (see Chapter 7). In order to ensure peace, people kept silent (Sarkar 2013, 126) and consigned democracy to the background (Bagchi 2012, 372).

The DGHC also signalled changes in the relation between the state and regional parties. While pre-1980s this relation was characterised by alliances, since 1988 the state took a more active role in regional politics by channelling funds to the council. Some allege that this helped the government to control the autonomy demands of the ruling party (Lacina 2009; Sarkar 2013; Lacina 2014). In this context, concessions for more autonomy mainly served to cement the hegemony of one regional party and to repress political competition (ibid.). Once, autonomy concessions reify the power of the party elites, these refrain to raise new autonomy demands. When the hegemony of the ruling party shakes, however, others jump in with demanding Gorkhaland again. In this instrumental reading (cf. Brass 1991) mobilisation for autonomy is but a tactic of local political competition (Sarkar 2013, Subba 1992). The idea of Gorkhaland transformed from an emotional expression of longing for liberation, justice, and recognition to an instrument in regional politics. Thus, the spread of Gorkha ethnic consciousness contributed to this establishment and sustenance of the dominant party-

regime. Gorkhaland as a totalitarian vision became embodied in a state-supported dominant party autocracy.

The establishment of the GJM in 2007 and the announcement of a "democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian" and more inclusive movement for Gorkhaland seemed to challenge this regime. But instead of leading to a radical regime change the GJM also began to rely on the established strategies for ruling. To answer the question of why people again lent their support to a party which presumably rules by similar means like the GNLF, in the following chapters I focus on the second Gorkhaland movement since 2007.

4 “Gorkhaland is our dream.” The power of an imagination

4.1 Introduction

It was another chilly morning on the tea plantation. As every morning Sita*, my host mother, was in a hurry to get ready for work. After fetching water she had to cook breakfast for the family, pack her lunch, and get her child ready for school. At around 7.30 am we would hurry to reach the working place somewhere on the slopes of the vast plantation. “When we come late they will cut our salaries”, Sita explained. After the *kāmdārī* (supervisor) had noted the attendance and instructed the women for that day’s work, they wore their aprons and disappeared amongst the bushes on the steep slopes, the bamboo *ṭokrī* (baskets) for the tea leaves fixed with a broad string to their foreheads (see Picture 1 in Chapter 1.4). When the sun came out or the rain started, the women opened their colourful umbrellas, balancing them on their *ṭokrī* so to use both hands for work. But what looked like a colourful part of Darjeeling’s picturesque landscape is in fact a scene of hard and exhaustive work. Although the world famous Darjeeling tea fetches high prices at the international market, the salary of those plucking the leaves was a meagre 90 INR a day during my stay there. This adds to the harsh and hierarchical working conditions.

In many conversations women and men alike expressed their dissatisfaction with the plantation labour. They were not only hoping for higher salaries and more opportunities to attain higher posts in the plantation system but also for the fulfilment of the management’s commitments towards the workers, including coverage of their medical expenses, provision of an ambulance for emergencies, and money for house constructions. Typically, such demands are forwarded through the labour unions, who act as frontal organisations of the political parties. Most of them are affiliated to the dominant GJM. Interestingly, nearly all workers expressed dissatisfaction with these. Many blamed the union representatives, who instead of arguing for their case struck secret deals with the management, allegedly to receive money and better positions in the plantation hierarchy in return. Mostly, local union presidents were also leaders of the local or regional GJM branches, indicating their party-role rather than their union-roles. Most workers’ trust in the unions and their ability to improve things was very low, and instead of engaging in a non-existent labour movement, they pinned their hopes on the vision of Gorkhaland.

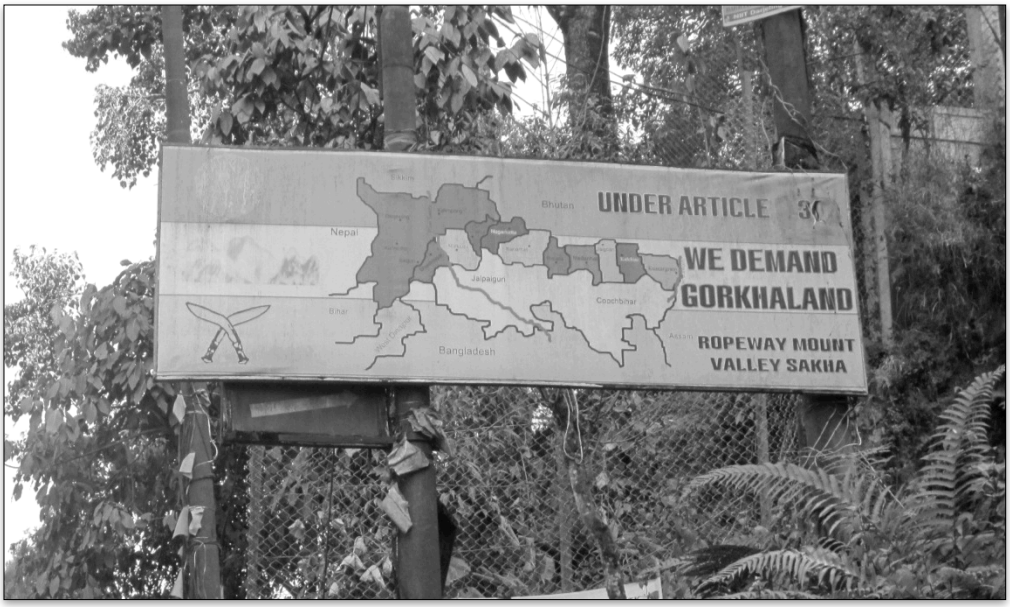
So why do people in Darjeeling continue to pin their hopes for a better life solely on the vision of Gorkhaland and not on any alternative imaginations or non-ethno-regional discourses to negotiate their claims on the state? Also beyond the tea plantations, most persons in Darjeeling I spoke to agreed that Gorkhaland was the ultimate aim they were striving for, regardless of their socio-

economic background, age or education. Such commitment to Gorkhaland was shockingly underlined by the death of three GJM followers in February 2011. The administration had stopped the GJM's *pada yatra*[86] to the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district, which regional parties claim as part of Gorkhaland (see map of Gorkhaland, Picture 2). Tension on both sides of the police barricades built up and when hundreds of activists eventually tried to trespass the barricades three of them were shot dead by the police, sparking violent protests in Darjeeling.

Yet, Gorkhaland is not the only available imagination projected upon this geographical space. Leaders of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA) for instance see Darjeeling as part of their imagined ancient kingdom "Mayel Lyang", the Tibetan population imagines it as "Dorje-ling" the place of the mystic thunderbolt of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (cf. Samanta 2000). Nationalist groups from Nepal claim it to be a part of a "Greater Nepal" and others in Darjeeling demand a merger of the district with Sikkim of which it had formed a part before the Gorkha-Kingdom captured it (see Chapter 3). More recently, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee proclaimed to make a "Switzerland" out of Darjeeling – yet within the West Bengal boundaries. But even after 2007, the imagination of Darjeeling as Gorkhaland prevails, and people's relation to the state continues to be negotiated in terms of Gorkha ethnicity which subsumes or sidelines other forms of identities, including class-based ones[87]. This raises the question of where the idea of Gorkhaland – 37 years after its invention in 1980 – still draws its strength from. While politicians' self-projection as true and committed fighters for Gorkhaland clearly underlines the usefulness of the idea of Gorkhaland for legitimising their existence (cf. Lacina 2014), such an instrumental reading of ethnic identity (see Chapter 1.2.2) does not explain why the dream of Gorkhaland (and not any other) is so appealing that people would subject themselves to injury or even death for it. I argue that the powerful appeal of this imagination lies in the way political leaders frame it as an "ethno-scape" (Schetter and Weissert 2007; Smith 1996c, 453) on the one hand, and as a redemptive solution to all problems of the Gorkhas on the other. First, they produce Darjeeling as an ethno-scape of Gorkhas by tying cultural, ethnic, and historical elements to the claimed space. Through the selective presentation of data, cultural elements, and history, such imagined geographies undergird regional boundaries and marginalise alternative imaginations. Thereby they attain a strategic character (Reuber 1999).

[86] Journey by foot; also: foot pilgrimage of Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi had led *pada yatras* as part of the Indian independence agitation.

[87] Although after the DGHC agreement in 1988 the emergence of ethnic associations striving for tribal status of select sub-ethnic groups signalled an alternative for negotiating demands with the state, the revival of the Gorkhaland movement in 2007 brought Gorkha ethnicity back to the forefront. Chapter 8 discusses the tribal-status demands in more detail.



Picture 2: Map of Gorkhaland as envisaged by the GJM, including Darjeeling district and the adjoining Dooars.The map is drawn on a sign-board in the colours of the GJM party-flag (green-white-yellow) which displays a sun-symbol, mountains, and crossed *khukurīs* as ethnic symbol. I took the picture on the road to Singmari, north of Darjeeling town in February 2011.

Second, in the rhetoric of politicians, ethnic-based discrimination and the "identity crisis" become the sole explanation for problems, and Gorkhaland the only solution. Such frames are reflected in Gorkhaland as an imagined geography. Importantly, Gorkhaland as an imaginative geography also expresses subjectivities: Chapter 1 showed that movements for new States can be seen as expressions of "aware citizens", who claim their rights from the state. In line with this, I show that the imagined geography of Gorkhaland is related to such subjectivities. Gorkhaland not only expresses but also shapes people's subjectivities evolving around aspirations for recognition and justice embodied in the ideal of a separate State. As a popular geography it carries hopes, aspirations, and meanings and also mirrors individuals' perceived relations to the state. This chapter aims to show how such subjectivities are formed and expressed through the Gorkhaland imagination, and to explore why alternative imaginations are less appealing to the Nepali-speaking majority of Darjeeling. In this way, I attempt to complement an instrumental reading of ethno-regionalism (see Chapter 1), which regards the demand for Gorkhaland mainly as an instrument of political elites in the struggle over resources with an approach that explains the *popular* appeal and power of the imagination in mobilising the masses.

In order to do so, I first introduce the concepts of imagined geographies, regionalisation, and "deep resources" of ethnic identity (Smith 1996b; Radcliffe 1998; Paasi 2002a). Based on these, in Chapter 4.3 I review attempts of the political elite in Darjeeling to design Gorkhaland as an ethno-scape while simultaneously presenting it as the sole solution to all problems of the Gorkhas. In Chapter 4.4, I review alternative imaginations of Darjeeling, and show why they lack popular appeal. In the fifth section I return to the tea workers I started this chapter with, and explore the connotations that Gorkhaland holds for them. The discussion shows how Gorkhaland expresses their subjectivities as framed by various leaders' rhetoric and their socio-economic background and also outlines differences and fractures between their imaginations and the political elites' imaginations. The conclusion proposes that the imagination of Gorkhaland does not only blur the boundaries between ethnic- and class-consciousnesses but also obscures the role of political leaders in maintaining the conditions against which the masses are protesting.

4.2 Regionalisation, strategic imaginative geographies, and ethno-symbolic resources[88]

I now introduce the conceptual framework to analyse how geographical imaginations form and express ethnic consciousness and identities. Sarah Radcliffe defines imaginative geographies as "the descriptions and discursive constructions around place which are made and re-made within a particular cultural setting" (Radcliffe 1998, 275). They are embedded in socio-cultural and historical contexts and transcend physical territory (Said 1978). I will show how imaginative geographies can take different functions for the generation and justification of ethno-regionalism and autonomy demands and also help in mobilising the masses to participate in such movements. I begin this discussion by showing how imaginative geographies function in the construction of regions as ethno-scapes, and then turn to their strategic utilisation for justifying claims on space. I then show how imaginative geographies in conjunction with redemptive promises can attain the role of social action frames. I then display how these dimensions of imaginative geographies relate to the constitution of identities and subjectivities.

4.2.1 Regionalisation and ethno-scapes

Regionalisation refers to the manifold cultural, political, and economic processes through which regions come into being, reflected in collective social classifications, identifications, and practices (Paasi 2002a). One specific form of regions, which is important for this study is their construction as

[88] This section is partly based on Wenner (2013) and Wenner (2015, forthcoming).

"ethno-scapes" (Smith 1996c, 453; Schetter and Weissert 2007). Anthony Smith's approach to ethno-nationalism is useful to understand the spatial bases of ethno-regionalism.

Anthony Smith stressed that ethnic ties and memories are indispensible for nations and nationalism to emerge. Accordingly, he defines nations as "a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members" (Smith 1996a, 359). Leaders need a repertoire to draw on in order to mobilise people to participate in nationalist movements (Smith 1996b, 591). This repertoire consists of "deep resources" of nationalism, namely (i) collective memories of a rich ethno-history and a golden age, (ii) belief in ethnic election, and (iii) collective belonging to an ancestral homeland or the territorialisation of memory (Smith 1996b).

First, idealised memories of a golden age define a normative standard to formulate and evaluate the current position of a group. The ideal of a golden age induces a sense of regeneration and restoration to a former glorious state which is contrasted with perceptions of inner decline and alienation. Golden ages establish a link between the past and the future of a community in a certain space, because the "national rebirth" is closely linked to a sense of collective destiny (Smith 1996b). The second element, the belief in "ethnic election"(Smith 1996c, 452) stems from the ideal of "chosenness". It is part of a nationalist doctrine that expresses a nation's authentic identity and its distinctive and original ethnic culture through which it reveals its unique contribution to the world (ibid. 453). The third "deep resource", the territorialisation of memory describes the process whereby shared memories are attached to particular territories (Smith 1996c). Narratives make the landscape an indispensable element of a community's history so that specific spaces become an "ancestral homeland" (Smith 1996b, 590; Smith 1996c, 454), i.e. nations' territorial boundaries derive their significance from the memories associated with them, or particular geographical areas provide the scene for historic events such as migrations or battles, and function as the locus of settlement (Smith 1996b, 589). This not only fosters territorial demands but also makes shared memories national (Smith 1996c, 453).

Smith's elaborations underline that ethno-nationalism has a spatial base. Such construction of linkages between selected ethno-regional narratives, which link collective memories, perception of golden ages, and the belief in ethnic election to a claimed area can also serve as a strategic means. This brings us to the second dimension of imaginative geographies important for this study.

4.2.2 Strategic imagined geographies

Previous elaborations on regionalisation and the constitution of ethno-scapes underlined that imaginative geographies are not depictions of an objective "truth" but rather selective

representations of an obscured reality which emphasise some aspects while ignoring others. In this way they have the power to define and interpret the world (Said 1978; Gregory 1995; Reuber 1999; Said 2000). Proponents of the "critical geopolitics" approach showed how imaginative geographies in connection with power and knowledge can attain a hegemonic character and serve as powerful instruments to legitimise the physical appropriation of space (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Gregory 1995). Reuber termed such selective representations and descriptions of claimed territories "strategic imaginative geographies" (Reuber 1999). These are consciously constructed by actors to bring their claims on space forward. They serve to inform and convince the public, media, or decisive committees and also foster the mobilisation of potential supporters and their loyalty to the space-related objectives and their advocates (ibid.). The specific form of these strategic imaginative geographies reflects the space-related objectives, for example envisaged administrative boundaries, the coherence of areas, and the functions and forms of governance of the envisaged territory. They also express the socio-economic, historic, and political context of their emergence. As I will show the Gorkhaland imagination is not only entangled with the broader structures of the post-colonial Indian state but also reflects socio-economically embedded aspirations of tea plantation workers.

Edward Said (2000) pointed out the function of selective representations and distortions of history as elements of strategic imaginative geographies. Prioritisation and manipulation of memories and narratives of places become elements of a cultural struggle over territory (ibid.). Such invented versions of history can serve to legitimise current claims on territory and become part of a hegemonic imagination of history and place (Radcliffe 1998, 275, 280). Accordingly, also the construction of regions as ethno-scapes can be understood as "expressions of a perpetual struggle over the meanings associated with space, representation, democracy and welfare" (Paasi 2002a, 805).

4.2.3 Frames and identities

Reuber's approach stressed that imagined geographies are functional in legitimising space-related objectives, such as the creation of a new union State and in mobilising the population to support such claims. This mobilising function is, as I will show below, supported by political elites' attempts to frame such space-related objectives as solution to a group's problems. This way imaginative geographies attain the form of social action frames. McAdam et al. (1996) define frames as "conscious strategic efforts by groups […] to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 6). Frames identify problems, propose a solution, and motivate people to engage in order to fulfil the demand (Snow and Benford 1988). Their ability to promote certain views on the world directly

relates to the potential of the imagined geographies to shape identities and subjectivities (Radcliffe 1998; Boudreau 2007; Gregory 1995).

Radcliffe termed the relations between identities and imaginative geographies as "geographies of identity" (Radcliffe, 1998, 275), which express feelings of belonging and affiliation to certain places, regions, or the nation. Similarly, Boudreau (2007) regards imaginative geographies as "collectively shared internal worlds of thoughts and beliefs that structure everyday life" (ibid. 2596). They are mental maps representing a space to which people relate and identify themselves with. They do not only reflect a person's socialisation and views on the world (Travares and Brosseau 2006) but are also loaded with his/her sorrows and feelings (Radcliffe 1998). Importantly, Radcliffe (2001) shows that such creation of shared meanings and common discourses is never complete, and geographies of identity are not fixed but are in a continuous flux. In her research on the utilisation of geography in creating national affiliations she showed how individuals and groups contest state-produced national imaginative geographies. They propose alternative affiliations and histories against the state's attempts to homogenise a populace (Krishna 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Agnew 2001). Such "popular geographical identities" create new spaces through which (alternative) notions of community, citizenship, and identity are expressed (Radcliffe 2001, 137). Accordingly, imaginative geographies are not only a means and expression of the mental appropriation of space but have a performative character. They produce the world they are envisaging (Massey 2001, 10).

In this reading, demands for new States are not just challenges to existing geographies of power, and attempts to replace these with different political-geographical orderings (Werlen 1995, 366) such as sub-national autonomy. They also challenge dominant identity ascriptions, which draw boundaries between national and regional identities (Agnew and Brusa 1999; Radcliffe 2001; Wenner 2013) and neglect the existence of simultaneous and multiple overlapping affiliations (Radcliffe 1998, 289).

In the remainder of this chapter I use the concept of imaginative geographies and their roles as regions/ethno-scapes, strategic means, and identity-generating frames to explore which meanings Gorkhaland as an imaginative geography conveys for different groups. I use the concept of regionalisation and "deep resources" of ethno-nationalism to show how political leaders draw Darjeeling as an ethno-scape, which attains strategic character in justifying the demand towards the government on the one hand, and in mobilising the population on the other. As such an ethno-scape and solution, the imagination of Gorkhaland expresses and shapes ethnic identities and challenges national geographies which confine Darjeeling to a marginal space, expressed in the Gorkhas' "identity crisis" or "anxieties of belonging" (cf. Middleton 2013b, 609) (see Chapter 3). A comparison of politician's attempts to frame Darjeeling as Gorkhaland with alternative imaginations of

Darjeeling, and perceptions of tea plantation residents, however, underlines that while the imagination of Gorkhaland privileges certain identities it also excludes and neglects others.

4.3 Ethno-scapes, the "identity crisis", and Gorkhaland

I now explore ways political leaders in Darjeeling frame Gorkhaland. I begin with a discussion of the redemptive properties of the statehood demand, which leaders claim could address the Gorkhas' "identity crisis" and developmental grievances alike, and then turn to the ways they design Darjeeling as an ethno-scape by connecting "deep resources" of ethno-nationalism to the claimed territory (Smith 1996b). These constructions also challenge the relation of the region to an imagined Indian nation. In combination, these elements not only justify the statehood demand towards the government but also construct subjectivities expressed in the visionary imaginary of Gorkhaland as a national ethno-scape (Wenner 2013). In this way politicians utilise the Gorkhaland imagination as a "frame" (Snow and Benford 1988), which not only identifies the causes of the communities' problems but also presents a suitable solution. The presentation is based on interviews which I conducted with central leaders of the different Gorkha parties and organisations (GJM, CPRM, AIGL, GNLF, and BGP) between January 2011 and July 2012; party-pamphlets/documents including the GJM's publications "Why Gorkhaland?" (GJM, 2009); and "The case for Gorkhaland" (GJM, 2008) (which functioned as document presented towards the Indian government); as well as public speeches of political leaders.

4.3.1 "Anxious belongings" and Gorkhaland as an "address"

Travelling in Darjeeling district gives an impression of its fuzzy and – at least for me – invisible boundaries. Although the hilly landscape towards the east, west, and north flows in a seeming continuum, my friends regularly pointed at the invisible administrative and national borders which give the district its shape. "Across that river Sikkim starts", they said, or: "Can you see that mountain far away? This belongs to Bhutan". Once, while travelling on the road up to Mirik, a small town close to Darjeeling's western border, my friends pointed out: "Miriam, over there is Nepal!" I looked out of the jeep window but could see nothing but a white wall of heavy fog. "Well, you cannot see it today but Nepal is there", my friend stated. It is this misty national border between Nepal and India that divides two seemingly alike places, which provides the backdrop to the argument which Subash Ghisingh framed as the Gorkhas' "identity crisis".

Chapter 3 showed how Gorkha ethnic consciousness developed historically partly from the realisation of Nepali-speaking Indians' fuzzy relation to an evolving Indian nation. As argued, Subash

Ghisingh had innovatively coupled the statehood demand to questions of citizenship, national recognition, and security during a time of perceived political and socio-economic crisis. This not only struck an emotional chord amongst the anxious population but also implanted the belief that only the creation of Gorkhaland could address their "identity"-problems. Although Ghisingh's agitation did not succeed with the creation of Gorkhaland, the "monster of identity" (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013) which he had created lived on. Twenty-seven years later, when the second Gorkhaland agitation started under the GJM, the "identity crisis" again served to mobilise the masses, drawing on the same anxieties of belonging (Middleton 2013c, 609) and existential fears.

Like Ghisingh previously, post 2007, the leaders of the second Gorkhaland movement blamed the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship (see Chapter 3) for creating confusion about the Gorkhas' national status, exacerbated by similar culture and language, and physical resemblance with the Nepali neighbours across the border (interviews: R.B. Rai, 2.4.2012, H.B. Chettri, 7.2.2011). R.B. Rai explained the difficulties for Gorkhas to fit into an envisaged Indian nation:

> We Nepalese are as un-Indian like Indians [...]. If you go to Mirik [near the Nepal border] you see: here is Nepal – there is India [...]. There is no difference, hill, river, grass, people... You cannot see that these are different countries. If we go there we do not feel that this is an outside place, it looks like ours. (interview, 2.4.2012)

Like Ghisingh before, the new leaders claimed that only a separation from West Bengal would solve this "identity crisis", "because the boundary is that thing which creates identity" (H.B. Chettri, interview, 7.2.2011). Enos Das Pradhan (from BGP) underlined the existential importance of Gorkhaland. The new State, he claimed was "an attempt of delinking from Nepal because our future lies in delinking from Nepal" (interview, 16.7.2011). Leaders also related the perceived lack of development to the "identity crisis". Unemployment and lack of infrastructure and proper medical facilities are attributed to an "internal colonialism" of the West Bengal government, which exploited their hills of their resources. H.B. Chettri, the then spokesperson of the GJM (and since 2011 MLA), summarised this argument as follows:

> So once and for all, if you want to resolve this crisis we will create a State [...]. Then nobody will ask you: where you are from. And your developmental agendas are taken care of, you are there to rule yourself [...]. At least you enter the mainstream of Indian politics. Right now we don't have a direct link to the Indian government. We have to go via the State, so automatically you become some kind of second class citizen. (interview, 7.2.2011)

As developmental concerns can be addressed through budgetary adjustments or autonomous councils (E.D. Pradhan, interview, 16.7.2011) all leaders unanimously stressed the "identity crisis" as the major problem which could only be addressed through the creation of a separate State.

4.3.2 Darjeeling as a national "ethno-scape"

The Gorkha leaders face a dilemma: on the one hand they need to mobilise the masses based on an ethnic rhetoric, which stresses uniqueness and differences from Bengal, on the other hand they must not appear as anti-national but formulate their demand in the broader framework of the Indian nation. This is particularly important as they are sometimes blamed for being secret agents of a "Greater Nepal" (see Chapter 4.4.5). The Gorkha leaders underline their allegiance to the Indian nation not only by stressing that their demand was raised within the framework of the Indian constitution. They also interweave it with references to the colonial "martial race" theory and a construction of Darjeeling as a frontier-space, underlining geostrategic anxieties of the Indian government. For instance, the leaders point at the Gorkhas' "loyalty" as brave soldiers, claiming that "Gorkhaland could be a fortress" (H.B. Chettri, interview, 17.2.2011), and a "buffer" State of "Gorkhas [...] who have always proved their unstinting loyalty to the nation" (GJM 2009, 12, 13). But such geostrategic imaginative geographies alone are not sufficient to underscore the belonging of people to the claimed territory. Rather, Gorkha leaders draw on the above introduced "deep resources" of ethnicity: the claim to uniqueness, the territorialisation of history, and idealised memories of a golden age (Smith 1996b).

Uniqueness and boundaries

Gorkha leaders utilise the nationalist principles of uniqueness and "ethnic election" (Smith 1996c, 452) to draw ethnic differences to Bengalis and undergird the envisaged boundaries of the Gorkhaland State, including the contested Dooars region at the southern fringe of Bhutan. They do so by describing both the Gorkhas and the people of Darjeeling as different, distinguished from the people of the rest of Bengal by their culture, language (Nepali instead of Bengali), and physical characteristics. Also the topographical distinction between "hills" and "plains" serves as reference to underline that the Gorkhas are a "distinct race" (Thulung, 2008, GJM). R.B. Rai (CPRM) portrayed Darjeeling as the "social, political and symbolic centre of all Indian Gorkhas" (interview, 17.7.2012), thereby stressing its importance for Indian Nepalis living outside Darjeeling. To underline cultural differences, in 2008 the GJM had directed people in Darjeeling town to wear traditional Nepali attire such as *chaubandi cholo*[89], *daura shuruval*[90] or *daka topi* [91] (see Chapter 5). Also selective references to the districts' history support the claim to uniqueness. Referring to the time when Darjeeling still belonged to Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal, the political leaders argue that the territory had been

[89] Traditional Nepalese short coat usually in the colourful *daka* fabric worn by women; it is twice folded on the front side and is tied with four small ribbons
[90] Traditional Nepalese attire worn by men; the upper part consists of a twice folded knee-long tunic, the lower part of a wide paint in the same colour.
[91] Traditional Nepalese hat in the colourful *daka* fabric.

artificially added to Bengal through treaties with "foreign countries" but had never been ruled by any king of the "plains of Bengal" (GJM, 2009, 3). In this context they also point at the colonial exclusionist governance which had separated it from the rest of Bengal (see Chapter 3).

While such rhetoric creates differences with Bengal, Gorkha leaders stress their similarities to the inhabitants of the Dooars, which they claim as part of the envisaged Gorkhaland. Such claims are complicated by the fact that this belt at the southern fringe of Bhutan does not belong to Darjeeling but to Jalpaiguri district, and has a mixed population (see Chapter 1). Here, the GJM does not have a majority hold[92]. Further, some adivasi and Bengali groups oppose the Dooars' incorporation into a Gorkha State. Although the Gorkha leaders acknowledge the different demographic set-up they promote the togetherness of the regions by stressing the common cultural, social or linguistic affinities. Nepali, the GJM claims, was the *lingua franca* of the Dooars (GJM 2009, 6, 7). Both, the Gorkhas and the adivasis are described as poor communities oppressed by the Bengalis. The proclamation of the togetherness of Dooars and Darjeeling even culminated in a short-time name-change of Gorkhaland. In a vast public meeting at North Point College in Darjeeling on 30.6.2010[93], Bimal Gurung announced the demand of a "Gorkha Adivasi Pradesh":

> We are the same *matvālī jāt* [alcohol-drinking caste]. We stay in the same place and work together. We planted the tea bushes together [...]. We were together yesterday, and we should be together today and tomorrow. [...] We declare a 'Gorkha Adivasi Pradesh'. This is for Gorkhas and for adivasis [...]. We should invite each other, we should love each other.

Other Gorkha leaders cite the fact that some areas of the Dooars had been part of the Darjeeling Parliamentary Constituency till 1976 as an indicator for the areas' togetherness (E.D. Pradhan, interview, 16.7.2011). To underline their claims to the Dooars, the GJM had also performed a *pada yatra* from Darjeeling to the river Sunkosh at the Assam border, where its activists planted GJM flags and performed a *bhumi puja*[94]*.* Participants of the week-long journey were later celebrated in Darjeeling[95]. The Gorkhas' claim to the Dooars was also shockingly underlined in February 2011, when three GJM activists were shot dead by the police while attempting to trespass police barricades set-up to prevent a *pada yatra* crossing over to Jalpaiguri district from Darjeeling. Also in slogans

[92] To increase its hold, in the 2013 *panchayat* elections the GJM struck an alliance with Barla-led *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM) and secured 13 *gram panchayat*s out of the 70 in the Dooars. TMC won 17 and the Left Front 18, while in the remaining *gram panchayat*s there was no clear majority (*TT*, 29.07.2013).

[93] Importantly, this massive meeting attended by Darjeeling MP Jaswant Singh (BJP) was held only few days after the public outcry over the murder of AIGL president Madan Tamang had triggered fierce protests against the GJM and its president in Darjeeling town. It basically functioned as a presentation of strength and force (see Chapter 7 and 8).

[94] This Hindu religious ritual sanctifies the ground and is usually practised before construction of houses or other structures starts.

[95] Importantly, to travel safely through the contested Dooars areas the GJM sought support from the Kamptapur Progressive Party who demands the creation of a Kamptapur State comprising Darjeeling and the Dooars. The GJM alliance with the Greater Kamtapur United Forum split in 2008 (Bagchi 2012).

shouted during demonstrations and public meetings, GJM-activists underline their claim on the Dooars' territory (see Picture 2).

Such performances, narratives, and selective representation of data serve to underline the envisaged boundaries of a Gorkhaland State. Yet, although all parties stick to their claim to the Dooars, Bimal Gurung's "Gorkha Adivasi Pradesh" proposal did not enter the mainstream of the movement and was soon dismissed, probably also because of a lack of support amongst the adivasis who felt threatened by the possible incorporation into a Gorkha State (*The Statesman*, 31.08.2011)[96]. Eventually, the June 2012 report of the Justice Syamlal Sen Committee, which was nominated to sort-out territorial claims of the GJM regarding the area to be included under the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) excluded the Dooars (except for five *mouzas*) based on reasons of lack of "compactness", "contiguity", and "homogeneity" (Government of West Bengal 2012)[97]. Despite the initial protests of the GJM against the lack of areal attribution the GTA was established on the former DGHC area in August 2012 (see Chapter 1).

Territorialisation of memory

The territorialisation of memory describes the process where selected narratives are tied to a (claimed) physical territory, and plays an important role in regionalisation (Paasi 2002a). For the Gorkha leaders, the selection of narratives is not an easy task. The "anxiety of belonging" (Middleton 2013b, 609) and the entailed need to present Darjeeling's population as genuine Indian citizens forces them to play down the history of colonial-time migration, or in the words of Besky (2013, 139) to prioritise a "primordial understanding" (in contrast to a "historical understanding") of the Gorkhas' relation to the land.

All interviewed leaders stressed that even prior to the British occupation of Darjeeling, Nepalis had already been staying there, and were incorporated in British India "together with their land" (interviews E.D. Pradhan 16.7.2011; R.B. Rai 17.7.2011). The BGP's website for instance describes the Gorkhas as "people who were assimilated into British India *along with their land* under the Treaty of Sugaulee of 1815 and [the] descendants of those people of Nepali origin who migrated to India since the *pre*-British era" (BGP 2015, my emphases). Such statements, which are often supported by "scientific" accounts of the intellectual "study forum"[98] of the GJM, are intended to underline that

[96] Instead, their leaders stress on the need for development, and have proposed bringing the areas under the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution, which grants tribal autonomy under the respective State government.
[97] Significantly, the exact meaning of these criteria was not explicitly defined in the report (for a discussion see Sarkar 2013). For a map displaying the GJM's areal demand and the Sen Committee's recommendation see *TT*, 10.06.2012.
[98] Unlike the GNLF, the GJM from the beginning placed emphasis on giving a voice to intellectuals through the "study forum" which besides backing up the party's argumentation with "historical facts" initially also

the Nepalis – like the Lepcha – form an indigenous population. Expressions such as "this land was ours and still belongs to us" (Bimal Gurung, speech, 7.5.2008), designations of Darjeeling as "homeland" (R.B. Rai, interview, 17.7.2011), and references to nature such as "The image of the *himāl* [mountain] as displayed on the 100 rupees note is our identity" (Bimal Gurung, speech, 7.5.2008) support the construction of such primordial ties by politicians. But although most politicians prioritise such a primordial reading, some also acknowledge a *historical* appropriation of the land. For instance, H.B. Chettri drew a direct connection between the Gorkhas' bodies, labour, and the land: "Who made Darjeeling? The tea […] all planted by the Gorkhas, the roads were made by them. Everything that Darjeeling is today is the blood and sweat of our ancestors. It is not some Banerjee or Chatterjee [Bengali names] who created Darjeeling" (interview, 7.2.2011).

Idealised memories of a golden age

A third element in the construction of the Gorkhaland imaginary are idealised memories of a golden age (Smith 1996c). For Gorkha leaders, this "golden age" is exemplified in the colonial time (*Britishko pālo*) with a caring and protective colonial government (see Chapter 3). They contrast such nostalgic imaginations with a time of governmental neglect and developmental decline after Independence. H.B. Chettri (GJM) claimed that:

> Whatever wealth the colony had created here during the [...] British regime – nothing was added by Bengal [...]. See in terms of infrastructure [...]. Look at the roads, it is getting worse. [...] All institutions worth their name were created by the British. If you minus them, [it] is something like [...] English literature without Shakespeare. [...] The place that was first [in catering to] the need of West Bengal, now that place has become impoverished due to the State's discriminative policy. (interview, 7.2.2011)

Part of this narrative of decline is the perceived threat posed by Bangladeshi migrants who – with reference to demographic data - are believed to have "overpopulated" previous Nepali strongholds in Siliguri and the Dooars. In contrast, the leaders portray Gorkhaland as means to recreate Darjeeling and revive its previous wealth. Thereby, the imagination of Gorkhaland carries the promise of self-realisation on the own soil and attains a strong mobilising potential.

A "pan-Indian grammar"

While such rhetoric evokes a picture of a group forging only an ethnic identity and regional belonging, a closer look reveals that these imaginations transcend regionalist propaganda. The expression of uniqueness and individuality, the emotional evocation of a lost golden age, and the togetherness of people and place helps mobilising the population and fostering an ethno-regional

formulated policy recommendations. Being disappointed with the party's political practices, many intellectuals withdrew their support from the GJM after some time.

consciousness. These references also draw on principles that are explicitly formulated in Indian history or States' reorganisation and its constitution. For instance, the Gorkha leaders' stress on cultural and linguistic differences and on the togetherness of people and place reflects the principle of linguistically and culturally homogenous States, which served as a major basis for India's reorganisation in 1956. The GJM takes direct recurrence to that principle: "In India, language has provided an obvious basis for formulation of separate states, because linguistic groups are also culturally distinct societies" (GJM 2008, 21). In this reading, the Gorkhas present a unique nation worthy of getting its own State, as other communities such as the Punjabis, Tamils, and Marathis did. The presentation of Darjeeling as a different place is, therefore, not only part of a strategy to separate it from Bengal but also a reflection of some criteria based on which Indian federalism stands (Wenner 2013). In this reading, the Gorkha leaders draw on what Baruah in his study on Assamese sub-nationalism has termed as "pan-Indian grammar" (Baruah 1999, 91). Darjeeling becomes a *national* ethno-scape[99].

4.3.3 Frames for subjectivities

As shown above, imaginative geographies and regionalisations stand in a direct relation to identities and subjectivities. Also the imaginative geography of Gorkhaland as promoted by regional politicians unites two aspects that offer specific geographies of identities as possible reference frames for people's subjectivities.

First, selected narratives which describe Darjeeling as a different, appropriated, and previously wealthy place powerfully link people, their past and their present to the claimed territory. The endowment of place with selected narratives makes Darjeeling an "ancestral homeland" and also underlines the Gorkhas' perceived "birth-right" to the land. Such purposefully established links between history, people, and place in the hegemonic narrative of the Gorkha leaders strives to construct a "regional identity" (Paasi 2002b, 146), an emotionally laden collective identification of people with their place. In politicians' narratives, Darjeeling becomes an ethno-scape, a space of and for the "Gorkhas".

[99] In Wenner (2013) I showed how the Gorkhaland imaginary contests what Johnson & Coleman (2012) have described as "internal othering", the designation of difference to and the exclusion of a weaker region by a more powerful one within a state (Jansson 2003).

Picture 3: During a GJM demonstration in Kalimpong, March 2012.The women, dressed in saris printed with the Nepali *ḍaka* colour shout slogans: "Without Terai Dooars there won't be elections to GTA! – Terai Dooars must be added! - 'We want justice' [Engl.]! – Our demand must come true! – Return the Gorkhas' land! – Gorkhas need a land! – What do we demand? Gorkhaland – What do the people of the hills want? Gorkhaland – What does the Muslim community want? Gorkhaland – What does the Bihari community want? Gorkhaland – What does the Bhutia community want? Gorkhaland – What does the Lepcha community want? Gorkhaland – What do those staying in the hills want? Gorkhaland – The one who brings Gorkhaland is Bimal Gurung! – Bring Bimal Gurung *dājū* (elder brother) forward! – Jai Gorkha Jai Gorkha (long live the Gorkha)! – We need our land!"

As a second element, Gorkhaland is presented as the ultimate solution to the problems of the "identity crisis" and developmental deprivation. Importantly, such problems are attributed to an exploitative and neglecting state solely, making it the major enemy and opponent of the community. In this context, Gorkhaland becomes a redemptive vision which proclaims that liberation/salvation is only possible through the (attainment) of an own space separate from West Bengal. Gorkhaland would provide a permanent address to the Nepalis, whose unsecure position vis-a-vis the Indian nation gives them a sense of deterritorialisation. Politicians claim that Gorkhaland would function as a homeland also for those living outside of Darjeeling. They present Gorkhaland as a guarantor for development, justice, equality, participation, autonomy, national recognition, and security. Gorkhaland becomes a fit-it-all solution which can bring back the lost wealth of a previous golden age.

Thus, the Gorkhaland imaginary not only draws on selected ethnic markers but also continuously reminds people of their ethnic belonging. At the same time it reminds them of their incompleteness in terms of belonging to an Indian nation. Gorkhaland attains the form of a promise for a bright future. It becomes "a dream worth living, a dream worth dying for" (Middleton 2010, 156). I contend that this imagination's mobilising power lies in its utopian character. This makes it a powerful tool for politicians, who – if they succeed in convincing the masses of their dedication and capability to fight for the dream – can use it to mobilise support for themselves and their parties (see Chapter 5).

But as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Gorkhaland is not the only geographical imagination projected on Darjeeling. I now briefly review some alternative imaginations of Darjeeling outside the realm of Gorkhaland. Some of these are formulated by some of the main contenders for power and control over Darjeeling.

4.4 Alternative imaginations

While the geographical imagination of Darjeeling as Gorkhaland attained a hegemonic status, there are actors, who promote alternative imaginations, and try to deconstruct the idea of Darjeeling as Gorkhaland. While some voices of dissent stem from Darjeeling itself such as the demand to designate Darjeeling as a tribal area to bring it under the 6th Schedule (GNLF), to merge Darjeeling with Sikkim (Gorkha National Congress), or the Lepcha's imagination of their ancient Kingdom of "Mayel Lyang", the demand of Gorkhaland also received critical responses from outside of the hills. Amongst these groups are the West Bengal government (CPI-M first and since 2011, TMC), Bengali groups in the plains (such as the *Bangla O Bangla Bhasa Bachao Samiti* (BOBBBS), *Dooars Terai Nagarik Manch*), as well as one faction of the *Akil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parisad* (ABAVF). Imaginations of Darjeeling do not stop short at the national boundaries. Some nationalist groups in Nepal demand the region to form part of a "Greater Nepal". In addition to these alternative imaginations the following chapter also provides a brief account on the view of the Indian government. However, as I will show, none of these imaginations has been able to capture the imagination of the majority in Darjeeling, underlining the appeal of the redemptive statehood idea.

4.4.1 Views from the State: CPI-M and TMC

Today, both the CPI-M and the TMC are strong opponents of the Gorkhaland demand and instead try to accommodate ethnic aspirations through regional autonomy under the State's authority. Significantly, the CPI-M (previously CPI) has made a u-turn regarding the autonomy question. Although the CPI had proposed the creation of the new nation state Gorkhasthan in 1947, the party's

policy changed considerably in the 1950s, when it diverted from the Soviet doctrine of national self-determination and instead sought to accommodate ethnic movements through regional autonomy (cf. Brass 1985; see Chapter 3). This approach finds expression in its concept of a "state-within-the-state" or an autonomous council under the State government (interviews, S. Pathak, 23.7.2011; A. Bhattacharya, 9.7.2012). The CPI-M leaders stressed that the party generally opposes all statehood demands in India and instead aims at strengthening the existing States in order to balance the influence of the national government. They claimed that separations on ethnic lines would not only obscure the class divisions of society (K.B. Watter, interview, 7.3.2012) but also endanger the internal unity of India as many other demands for statehood would follow.

Ashok Bhattacharya, who played an important role during the CPI-M government's dealing with Darjeeling, believed that the demand for statehood would make it easy for "foreign hands, the US imperialists, [to take] advantage" (interview, 9.7.2012). CPI-M leaders also contradicted claims of Darjeeling's developmental backwardness and the Gorkhas' "identity crisis". Pointing at Darjeeling's relatively high Human Development Index (see Chapter 1), Ashok Bhattacharya stressed that Darjeeling was well developed in West Bengal in comparison with other provinces. Any grievances of the Gorkhas should be addressed through "special developmental packages" instead of statehood (ibid.). Further he claimed that Darjeeling had too small an area and little population and separation was not economically viable (ibid.). The CPI-M detected the "identity crisis" at the heart of the Gorkha leaders' argumentation as a "political strategy" of Gorkha leaders to attain statehood and prescribed to address any problems related to a feeling of discrimination through development and not through territorial boundaries. Then *Rajya Sabha* member Saman Pathak (CPI-M) also rejected the notion of Darjeeling as "homeland" for all Indian Nepalis (interview, 23.7.2011). Also the Gorkha parties' claim to the Dooars was rejected. Ashok Bhattacharya described this demand as "political", and as raised to "increase their area" (interview, 9.7.2012). Ahead of the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections the CPI-M re-iterated its inclination to bring Darjeeling under the 6th Schedule, as Ghisingh (GNLF) had demanded (see below).

Reflecting the CPI-M's stand on regional autonomy, till 2011 the State government had been involved in bi-partite and tri-partite negotiations with the GJM and the centre which focused on the creation of an "interim council" for Darjeeling. But in July 2011 it was the new CM Mamata Banerjee who eventually succeeded in bringing the new council on the paper (see Chapter 1). From the beginning the TMC had employed a strategy of conciliation with the GJM. While none of the CPI-M leaders was able to travel to Darjeeling hills during the revived agitation, already in 2010 Banerjee – then national Railway minister – had met GJM top-leaders in Darjeeling, and promised special developmental assistance under her Ministry. After being elected Chief Minister in May 2011, Banerjee has

repeatedly stressed that the people of Darjeeling are her "brothers and sisters", and described Darjeeling as "her darling" or "my baby" (*TT*, 12.10.2011). Thus, while the Gorkha organisations attempt at drawing a sharp cultural and ethnic line between themselves and the Bengalis, Banerjee does not only stress unity between the plains and the hills but also her motherly attention. This also became visible in her frequent visits to the hills, and special financial support after the earthquake in September 2011. The heart of her strategy to appease the hills is the slogan of "peace, democracy and development". Stressing that there would be no division of Darjeeling and West Bengal, the CM attempts to replace the vision of Gorkhaland with the geographical imagination of "Switzerland" to be created from Darjeeling. At a public function at the central Chowrasta in Darjeeling town in October 2011, briefly after the GTA Act was promulgated, Banerjee underlined: "Darjeeling will be Switzerland and everybody's dreamland. The master plan for tourism development is underway, and once implemented the region will turn into Switzerland" (cited in: *SME Times*, 12.10.2011).

Thus, similar to the CPI-M approach, developmental funding becomes an official means in the TMC strategy to contain the Gorkhas' statehood aspirations. The vision of Switzerland as promoted by Banerjee yet mainly emphasises the touristic potential of Darjeeling. This one-sided vision thereby neglects not only ethnic sentiments including the "identity crisis" but also problems associated with plantation or agricultural labour. The GJM's occasional revival of the Gorkhaland demand post the 2011 GTA agreement and the CM's reiteration that there would be no partition of West Bengal combined with her attempts to establish TMC units in the hills (see Chapter 8) have led to a continuous up and down in the relation between the GJM and the State government. Till date, however, the State government has always managed to bring the GJM back into its fold, although neither the autonomous council model nor the imaginative geography of "Switzerland" hold any popular appeal in Darjeeling.

4.4.2 Views from the centre: BJP and INC

In India, the decision about the creation of new States is with the central government, although experience has shown new States are hardly created without the consent of the respective State government (cf. Tillin 2013)[100]. In this context, the stand of the parties ruling the national government is important. This concerns the INC which governed India during the violent 1986 Gorkhaland movement and during the revived movement post 2007. Since 2014 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during which legislation the three States of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttarakhand were created in 2000, overtook national power.

[100] The creation of Telangana in 2014 was an exception.

History suggests that the INC generally takes a rather conservative approach to the creation of new States. This becomes visible in its attempts to reframe ethnic aspirations of the Gorkhas as developmental grievances, which can be addressed through autonomous councils. Describing the centre as a moderator between State government and the GJM, Ajay Maken (MoS Home Affairs) stated that it "wants the region to prosper" and expressed hopes for an early execution of the interim authority to solve developmental issues (cited in: *Indian Express*, 19.3.2010). Although the INC has not made an explicit statement on the Gorkhaland demand, its role in the DGHC negotiations and its involvement after 2008 in tri-partite negotiations on an autonomous council underline that the party is not in favour of statehood for Darjeeling. While the party eventually gave in to the long-pending demand for Telangana in July 2013, it continued to ignore the Gorkhas' renewed pledges.

Unlike the INC, the BJP takes a more explicit stand on the statehood question, and regularly proclaims its sympathy for regional aspirations and "greater decentralisation through smaller States" (BJP 2014, 8). This programme made the BJP an attractive partner for the GJM, who supported it in the 2009 and 2014 parliamentary elections, hoping that it would forward its statehood claim in Delhi. Yet, the appendixes to the BJP election manifestos only make lose promises and lack clear reference to statehood. In the 2014 appendix to the manifesto the party again promised to

> sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long pending demands of the Gorkhas, the adivasis and other people of Darjeeling district and the Dooars region. (cited in: *ToI*, 9.4.2014)[101]

Also Narendra Modi, who became Prime Minister after the 2014 elections, pledged his sympathy to the Gorkhas before the 2014 elections. At a public meeting in Kaphrail near Siliguri he described them as trustworthy security guards and defenders of the country (Modi, speech, cited in: *Darjeeling Times,* 10.4.2014). Thereby, he indirectly rendered Darjeeling a place of *chaukidār*s (watchmen)[102], an identity ascription which is strongly rejected by most Gorkhas. Modi further assured: "I want to tell my Gorkha brothers, your dreams are our dreams, you (sic) be able to live with dignity, your rights be protected, you get development opportunities all together." (ibid.)

Despite such vague exclamations without any direct reference to statehood, the GJM-supported BJP candidates won the national elections from the Darjeeling constituency twice (in 2009 and 2014) with huge margins (see Table 1 in Chapter 1). On his official *Facebook* page Bimal Gurung claims that during a meeting BJP heavy-weight L.K. Advani "told the delegation that the GJM must continue its fight on behalf of the people of Darjeeling and justice would finally prevail. He agreed that Darjeeling

[101] Already in 2009 the BJP had stated that: "We will sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long pending demands of the Gorkhas, the adivasis and other people of Darjeeling district and Dooars region" (cited in: *The Hindu*, 9.4.2014).

[102] *Chaukidār* is a term used for watchmen, and carries a derogatory association for the Gorkhas, many of whom feel that other Indians ignore their intellectual and other capabilities.

was never a part of Bengal" (*Facebook,* 25.5.2014)[103]. Keeping in mind the icy relations between the TMC led West Bengal government and the BJP led centre, and the latter's attempts to target West Bengal (*The Hindu*, 8.6.2014) it makes sense to assume that such "support" is rather politically intended. This resembles attempts of the INC in the 1980s, who is blamed for funding Ghisingh's movement to disturb the CPI-M led West Bengal government (cf. Kohli 1997b) (see Chapter 3).

Besides, it makes sense to assume that the national government's considerations regarding Gorkhaland are also shaped by concerns for national security (cf. Bagchi 2012). Darjeeling belongs to the so called "chicken neck", the small section of Indian territory shaped by four international boundaries (Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and – via Sikkim – China), which connects the heart land to the conflict-ridden North-East. Any disturbances in this geopolitically sensitive region are thus seen as threats to national security (Ramachandran 2011; Unnithan 2011). Modi's reference during the above mentioned public meeting in Kaprail to "Bangladeshi infiltrators", who allegedly deprived the Indian citizens of jobs and land (cited in: *Darjeeling Times,* 10.4.2014) underlines such concerns. Thus, any government probably wants to avoid any prolonged disturbances or uproar in this area. This is underlined by the speedy action of the centre INC and the West Bengal government during the large scale protests against Ghisingh and the 6th Schedule proposal in 2007-2008 (see Chapter 5).

4.4.3 Alternative voices from within

Tribal Darjeeling – the 6th Schedule demand

Although it was Subash Ghisingh who empowered the vision of Gorkhaland, in the early 2000s he started working on another idea, namely to bring Darjeeling under the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution. The 6th Schedule grants regional autonomy under the purview of the respective State government to areas with large tribal population. Unlike the DGHC agreement, the 6th Schedule provides constitutionally guaranteed autonomy and is considered stronger than other regional autonomy agreements. Originally it had been created as a safeguard for the mainly tribal populated North-Eastern States of India. But although by 2005, only 32 percent of Darjeeling's population were Scheduled Tribes (Middleton 2010, 35), in December 2005 Ghisingh signed a tripartite Memorandum of Settlement in Delhi to bring Darjeeling under the 6th Schedule. In the consecutive months he tried to convince people in Darjeeling of the benefits of the Schedule, which he described as providing special political protection and security through its constitutional guarantee. Part of this strategy was also to make people believe that they were actually "tribal" (see Chapter 3):

> The 6th Schedule is not for the people [...], it is for the soil, to make this soil tribal (*janjātīko*). [...] Whatever land is there in the hills – all this will be tribal land [...]. And we will get political protection, total protection

[103] Last accessed: 27.5.2014. This statement was not confirmed by any official BJP sources.

> of tribals – we are tribals [...]. When the land becomes tribal then all who stay here become tribal. All insects become tribal, the dogs and goats all become tribal. (S. Ghisingh, speech at Norbung tea estate, 17.12.2006)

Such attempts were coupled with forced performances of "tribalness", such as the direction to worship a *shīlā* (sacred stone) instead of Godess Durga during Dashain (the Nepalese main religious festival) and processions of *jhākrīs* (shamans) and public display of their performances. Further, with reference to the emergence of the North-Eastern State of Meghalaya out of a previous 6th Schedule area the GNLF described it as a stepping stone towards statehood[104]. Some GNLF leaders also expressed the belief that under the 6th Schedule the tea proprietors would have to lease the land from the regional government and not from the State government as at present, which would make it easier to control them. Yet, before the 6th Schedule bill could be passed by the national parliament in late 2007, the popular uproar against Ghisingh in Darjeeling had reached a critical point. Spearheaded by the GJM, an alliance against the 6th Scheduled was formed, which managed to bring its implementation to a halt (see Chapter 5). The alliance opposed the bill on grounds that the plains areas of Siliguri including its important infrastructure (railway station, university, medical college, airport, etc.) and the Dooars were excluded from the envisaged autonomous area and that privileges to the minority tribal population would result in a split of the Gorkha community, leading to "fragmentation, division and discrimination" (GJM 2007, 6). Although the 6th Schedule did not yet become a reality, Ghisingh continued promoting this idea in Darjeeling, and made it part of his strategy to re-claim the lost control[105] (see Chapter 8).

Darjeeling as part of "Mayel Lyang"

While the Gorkha parties mainly represent Nepali speaking groups, which are in majority in Darjeeling hills, minority groups such as the Lepcha, who constituted 2% of the hill population in 2001 (Chapter 1) find less representation amongst them[106]. Instead, the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA), which calls itself a non-political organisation with the aim to preserve and revive Lepcha culture, language, and script, and to fight for the upliftment of the community in developmental terms, claims to represent the group. The Lepcha are considered the aborigines of

[104] In fact, the other north-eastern States of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura had been Union Territories before being upgraded to States.

[105] This strategy includes the distribution of leaflets with extended written explanations about the properties of the 6th Schedule to re-established party units in various villages, and Ghisingh's statements during the 2011 Legislative Assembly Election campaign reiterating his demand. Also the CPI-M reassured its support to the 6th Schedule ahead of the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections.

[106] This is a development that started with the establishment of the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) in 1944, which unlike previous organisations explicitly spoke for the Nepalis, keeping the Tibetans and Lepcha out of their purview (see Chapter 3). Despite the GJM's attempts to include minority groups through via its "minority front" it apparently never managed to entice the majority of the Lepcha.

Darjeeling district and have their highest concentration in the Kalimpong sub-division. Instead of joining the Gorkhaland struggle, the ILTA promotes a view of Darjeeling district as part of their imagined ancient kingdom "Mayel Lyang", the "land of hidden paradise" (Tamlong 2010).

Although Lepcha leaders define clear territorial boundaries of Mayel Lyang (as extending from the Himalayas to Titalaya in the South, to Gipmochi mountain at the junction of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet in the east, and to Arun river in Nepal in the west, ibid.), anthropologist Jenny Bentley stresses that it refers to the Lepcha's *imagined* ancestral homelands (personal communication). In any case, it symbolises an idealised "golden age" of the Lepcha. With reference to historical British sources and place names deriving from Lepcha language, Lyangsong Tamsang, the President of ILTA, described the Lepcha as the "true masters of the soil" (interview, 11.3.2012). According to him the place name for Darjeeling had previously been "Daar-yjoo-Lyaang", meaning "Abode of Gods/Goddesses" in Lepcha language, and was subsequently changed by the Tibetans and the British to "Dorje-lyang" and "Darjeeling" respectively. To support his argument he claims that huge portions of land were owned by the Lepcha. He portrays Darjeeling's history as a story of decline and destruction: a once beautiful place has been destroyed by the intruding outsiders rendering the Lepcha a deprived group. Importantly, many Lepcha refuse to be included into the "Gorkha" fold and instead stress their distinctiveness as an own ethnic community.

Fearing a further marginalisation – also in response to the revived Gorkhaland movement – in 2010 the ILTA and other Lepcha bodies formed the "Lepcha Rights Movement", which began campaigning for a non-territorial council for the group. Bentley interpreted this demand as an expression of the Lepcha's sensed need to symbolically reclaim the Darjeeling hills as their indigenous space (Jenny Bentley, personal communication). In September 2011, around the same time as the GTA Act was passed, the West Bengal CM announced the creation of a non-territorial Lepcha development board. Eventually, in early 2013, the West Bengal government passed the bill for the establishment of the "Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board", significantly naming the Lepcha's geographical imagination (and in clear contradistinction to the "Gorkhaland Territorial Administration" of the GJM). I address the establishment of the board and its implications for Darjeeling's political landscape in more detail in Chapter 8.

Sikkim merger and Union Territory

A third alternative for Darjeeling voiced from within the region is the claim of a break-away faction of the Darjeeling District Congress Committee to merge Darjeeling district with Sikkim. In January 2004, they founded the Gorkha Rastriya Congress (Gorkha National Congress, GRC) (Sarkar 2013, 90). Taking reference to the district's pre-colonial history, they argue that the easiest way to separate

Darjeeling from West Bengal was via its re-attachment to Sikkim. They justify this proposal with reference to the shared history, similar culture, and geographical characteristics of the two regions and with reference to the documented history of Darjeeling and Sikkim (see leaflet of the CRC for the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections). Although their demand reiterates the claim for separation from West Bengal, the imagination of Darjeeling as part of Sikkim has so far had less popular appeal. The reason is probably not only the group' lack of organisational strength but also the public's sensing that Sikkim's current CM Pawan Chambling and the majority of Sikkimese people reject a merger of the two regions.

Another alternative proposal was undertaken by members of Darjeeling District Congress Committee, who proposed to make Darjeeling a Union Territory instead of a separate State. Although this proposal would meet most of the demands of the Gorkhaland aspirants (including separation from West Bengal, and a new name for the area expressing its inhabitants' ethnicity as Gorkhas), it has so far not received much public response. This is surprising as the history of the emergence of many North-Eastern States suggests the potential upgrading of Union Territories to full-fledged States (e.g. Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura).

4.4.4 Voices from the plains: Bengalis, adivasis, and Kamptapuris

The Gorkha groups' demand to include the Siliguri sub-division and parts of the Dooars is met by fierce opposition of Bengali and some adivasi groups. In general, in order to support their opposition to Gorkhaland, the groups evoke two imaginative geographies: the first designs North Bengal as a place overrun by illegal Nepali immigrants; the second portrays Gorkhaland as a threat to national integrity. Instead, the BOBBBS, aims at a "strong and resurgent Bengal" for Bengalis being "in control of their own destiny", thereby helping the Bengali race out of its "perilous state" (BOBBBC 2011). This includes the "assimilation" of other groups into Bengali culture and language. Referring to the 1865 Treaty of Titalia, the BOBBBS portrays Darjeeling as an integral part of Bengal but remains silent on the district's special administrative status as excluded district during colonial time.

The main adivasi organisation in the Dooars, the ABAVP has a split opinion on the Gorkhaland demand. The organisation initially strongly opposed the Gorkhas' claim to the Dooars, where adivasis form a major part of the population, and instead demanded 6th Schedule status for the belt (not to be confused with Ghisingh's 6th Schedule petition)[107]. Yet, in October 2011 a faction led by tribal leader John Barla agreed to demand the "Gorkhaland Adivasi Territorial Administration" (GATA), an extended GTA, which would include the Dooars under its direction. John Barla justified this joint demand with reference to the need to deliver something (i.e. work, employment, etc.) to his people

[107] The resistance saw violent clashes between GJM and ABAVP supporters in January 2009, when thousands of GJM supporters were campaigning in the Dooars (*ToI*, 20.1.2009).

because otherwise they would join other parties: "Within the GTA there is very much development. So what is given to the hills should also be given here" (interview, 17.3.2012)[108]. After the government appointed Sen Committee's recommendations to not include the Dooars under the GTA, however, the alliance between Barla and GJM faded.

Another territorial claim is brought forward by groups (such as the Kamatapur People's Party, the extremist Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, and the Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Party), who demand the creation of a Kamatapur/Kamptapur, or Greater Cooch Behar State including the area of Darjeeling and Dooars for the Rajbanshi people. They justify their demand with reference to the ancient Kamata Kingdom, which comprised the areas of present North West Bengal and parts of Assam and Bangladesh in the 16th century (Das 2009)[109]. Significantly, till March 2008, the GJM had a political alliance with the Greater Kamtapur United Forum[110], which later broke down due to conflicts over the territory of the envisaged States (Bagchi 2012, 117)[111].

4.4.5 The international dimension: Darjeeling as "Greater Nepal"?

There has been confusion about whether the demand of Gorkhaland was a secret conspiracy to create a "Greater Nepal" (see discussion in: Subba 1992; Bagchi 2012). The imagination of Greater Nepal is promoted by nationalist groups in Nepal, who demand a re-establishment of the pre-1816 national boundaries between Nepal and India. In their argumentation, the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship has made all previous treaties obsolete, including the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816 between the Gorkha kingdom and the East India Company (see time-line, Appendix A). Accordingly, they demand a reestablishment of the previous boundaries and a return of the "lost areas" between river Sutlej (bordering Pakistan in the West) and Teesta (in Darjeeling) in the East (United Nepal Nationalist Front, UNNF, interview, 26.6.2011). Similar to the Gorkha parties, the UNNF describes Darjeeling and Sikkim as primordial homelands of Nepalis who had settled there even before the British time. Their well-elaborated argumentation conveys a strong anti-Indian sentiment. In their view, India does not only "colonise" the lost territories and encroaches areas along the border but also interferes in Nepal's internal political affairs. Thus, the demand for Greater Nepal must be

[108] After allying with the GJM Barla, in December 2011 was expelled from the ABAVP and now leads the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM) in the Dooars. For the 2013 *panchayat* elections in the Dooars the JMM allied with the GJM.
[109] The Kamatapur Kingdom was included into British India as the Princerly State of Cooch Behar and in 1950 was joined with West Bengal allegedly against the will of its population (Das 2009, 24).
[110] This comprises the Kamtapur Progressive Party, Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Party, and the Assam-based All Cooch Rajbanshi Students' Union.
[111] Already the AIGL had an alliance with Kamptapuri groups, who were signatories to the demand for Uttarakhand in 1949 (see Chapter 3).

understood as the attempt to establish a weight against these perceived Indian colonialist tendencies in Nepal.

Although the UNNF does not have any direct links to the Gorkhaland advocates in Darjeeling, they welcome the demand and see it as a first step towards the creation of a Greater Nepal (ibid.). However, all political groups in Darjeeling strongly reject such attempts of merger with Nepal. Taking into account that one mainstay of the Gorkhaland demand is the complete dissociation from Nepal through being a State in India, which would end the confusion about the Gorkhas' belonging to the Indian nation, and people's stress on their cultural and linguistic differences to Nepal, any allegations that Gorkhaland was a conspiracy to merge Darjeeling with Nepal are baseless.

4.4.6 Marginal imaginations

The brief outline underlines that Darjeeling is strongly contested in discursive terms and holds different meanings for different groups of people, conveying distinct identities outside of the Gorkha-spectrum. This becomes particularly clear with the powerful Mayel Lyang formulation of the Lepcha most of whom do not feel comfortable within the Gorkha-identity. While some of these alternative imaginations create distinct histories of the claimed territory, others rather aim at a deconstruction of the Gorkhaland claim. This is exemplified in the State government's approach to "Switzerland" or the Bengalis' opposition claims that all Nepalis were "foreigners". All the reviewed imaginations make strong use of selective versions of Darjeeling's history. Yet, none of these alternative imaginations is strong enough to replace the dominant vision of Gorkhaland, which since the 1980s mesmerizes the Nepali-speaking masses. This is largely because they lack reference to the Gorkhas' ethnicity and/or deny or do not address the "identity crisis". As will become clear in the following chapters, however, this marginalisation is also a result of the dominant reign of the GJM, and the lacking organisational strength of advocates of alternative imaginations.

4.5 Class and ethnicity – popular geographies of Gorkhaland

In Chapter 3, the review of political processes in the 20th century suggested that the emergence of Gorkha ethnic consciousness in Darjeeling was closely related to the activities of political parties and the language movement, which spread the awareness of ethnic belonging to the Gorkhas from the elites to the general masses. This provided the base for Subash Ghisingh to design Gorkhaland as an all-encompassing vision for Darjeeling. But like all studies on the 1980s more recent studies on the revived movement post 2007 remain largely silent on what Gorkhaland *means* to those in whose names it is being demanded and whether the frames promoted by political elites are adopted, adjusted, or rejected. Such an understanding is important as – with a view to understand the

construction of political authority as a two-sided relation between rulers and the ruled – the public response to politicians' statehood rhetoric affects their support amongst the masses. A comparison of political elites' and non-elite understandings of Gorkhaland also reveals how representative the formers' accounts are (cf. Corbridge 2002; Shah 2012).

To understand whether the Gorkha leaders' attempts to design Darjeeling as an ethno-scape of unique Gorkhas loyal to – but not recognised by – the Indian nation are successful and why the vision of Gorkhaland is more appealing than others to a majority in Darjeeling, I now explore what meanings, hopes, and aspirations the statehood idea conveys for those in whose names it is being demanded. I focus on accounts of tea-plantation workers and residents (from three different tea-plantations I visited in 2012 and 2013). I also add statements of shopkeepers and drivers, mainly from rural areas. I distinguish between pro-Gorkhaland and Gorkhaland-critical accounts. All respondents belonged to the Nepali-speaking majority of the district (and not to other groups such as the Lepcha or the Bhutia). I accomplish these data with findings from Besky's (2013) comprehensive anthropological study on tea plantation labourers. Importantly, the fact that all persons I spoke to were able to relate to the idea of Gorkhaland underlines its importance for the population. Yet, in 2012 and 2013 when I stayed on the plantations, many respondents' accounts were coupled with feelings of disappointment and anger towards politicians, owing to the fact that the prolonged agitation since 2007 had not brought the wished results (see Chapter 5).

4.5.1 Development, identity, and the land-question

Most plantation workers situated the demand of Gorkhaland in the socio-economic context of the tea plantation labour. Particularly female labourers believed that in Gorkhaland their wages would increase and more facilities[112] would be provided. This also concerned higher positions in the plantation labour hierarchy. The fact that mostly non-Nepalis are employed in manager or assistant-manager positions causes many grievances amongst both male and female workers, who feel that the "outsiders" would never allow them to climb up. These "outsiders" were often perceived as not caring for the future of the plantation, e.g. by refusing to replace old bushes with new ones. Besky (2013) saw a close relation of female workers' attempts to preserve the landscape of the tea plantation and statehood as in Gorkhaland, more caring managers would invest in a renovation of the plantation. She also found that such aspirations were related to an idealised "moral economy" between labour, management, and land. For workers, this referred to reciprocal relationships, where labours cared for the land of the plantation and the management in turn cared for the labour, i.e. by providing facilities (ibid. 17, 28). Besky interprets labourers' demand for Gorkhaland as a means to

[112] Such facilities include those mentioned in the Plantation Labour Act (1952), such as money for firewood, ration, water supply, house constructions and repair, basket, umbrella, blankets, and shoes (see Chapter 1).

revive this moral economy and with it the viability of the tea plantation. In this context, "justice" for labourers meant to be in control of the tea plantation land (ibid.). Statehood and an "own" government for Darjeeling would allow the control of the plantation proprietors and put an end to exploiting practices.

While Besky interprets the demand for Gorkhaland solely as related to the tea plantation and -labour, many accounts of workers also suggested their association of Gorkhaland with a better life *outside* of the plantation. Particularly female workers stressed that Gorkhaland would provide new employment opportunities outside the rigid plantation system, e.g. through the creation of new industries. Few women also explained that once Gorkhaland was attained non-Nepali groups such as Marwaris and Bengalis, who dominate private enterprises would leave[113] so that Nepalis could overtake their business

Especially, female workers in their role of mothers imagined such a future outside of the plantation for their children, whom they wanted to educate and enable an alternative life and income. Also younger persons – many of them educated at least up to class 10 but unemployed – connected their hopes for more employment opportunities and better education facilities (such as the creation of a university as proposed by politicians) with Gorkhaland. Instead of migrating to other places such as Delhi or Mumbai, there would be sufficient employment opportunities for well-qualified people in Darjeeling. None of the younger people I spoke to wanted to work on the plantation underlining the generational shift in aspirations for a better life.

But the imagination of Gorkhaland is not confined to a critique of the plantation labour or lack of employment opportunities. The statehood imagination is also directly formulated in opposition to the West Bengal government. Many respondents expressed their belief that in Gorkhaland profits from tea and other local resources such as hydro-power and taxes would remain with the people instead of going to the hands of Bengalis (many of whom run the tea plantations) and the Bengali government. They blame the latter for neglecting the genuine needs of the hills in terms of infrastructure and economic development. Such accounts reproduce a perception of state exploitation as proposed by politicians. Some expressed the belief that once Gorkhaland was attained, Darjeeling would become like the neighbouring State of Sikkim, which is perceived as well-developed, rich, and well-equipped with central government's financial support (see the notion of "transferred jealousy", Chapter 3). Like some politicians, some people contrasted the current situation of perceived governmental neglect and exploitation with a better *Britishko pālo* (British time, see Chapter 3) and acknowledged the colonisers' role in developing the now deteriorated

[113] One woman mentions that these groups would "return to their own land (*desh*)".

place. Some elders relativised this nostalgic "golden age" with their memories of the harsh working conditions during the *Britishko pālo*.

Besides such material aspirations, the imaginary of Gorkhaland also contains immaterial aspects related to class and status: An aspect frequently mentioned by both male and female labourers is the perception of exploitation connected to a feeling of inferiority. For instance, some women stressed that the Nepali *jāti* would always be working under someone else, that they were *munīko mānchhe* (people of the lower-level[114]), and expendable (*jhuse-muse*). For many, the imagination of Gorkhaland promises an end to such status and underlines the close interrelation of their subjectivities, their longing for perceived rights, and the imagination of statehood.

Besides expressing such developmental aspirations, some female workers and more male workers also drew a direct connection of the statehood demand to the question of their Indian identity, as promoted by political leaders. Gorkhaland would ensure their existence (*astitva*) as Indian citizens. One woman, who was active in the local *Nari Morcha*, explained that Gorkhaland would give them an "own address", reiterating the party rhetoric: "People in the plains call us foreigners. If we have an own land (*jagā*) then we can say that we are Gorkhas. People will recognise us as Gorkhas" (interview, 11.6.2012).

Such concerns about their recognition as Indians reflect the aforementioned "anxieties of belonging". These concerns are often underlined by anecdotes of journeys to Siliguri, the Bengali dominated business hub in the plains, where the workers do not only struggle with the Hindi and Bengali languages but are apparently frequently asked by bus conductors whether they needed a bus to the nearby Nepal border. This gives them the feeling of not being treated as *Indian* citizens. Others recited stories of travelling to other parts of India, where they were continuously held for Nepali citizens due to their looks and language. Appropriating politicians' rhetoric, many people simply assumed that if they can tell others that they stemmed from Gorkhaland everybody would know that this was an *Indian* State, putting an end to the confusion about their citizenship. Reflecting such anxieties, many respondents emphasised their differences to Nepalese citizens in terms of language and culture. Often, they proudly explained that the caste system in Darjeeling was not as rigid as in Nepal, or even non-existent. Instead of arranged marriages non-caste based love marriages prevailed. These accounts of difference underline the importance of the question of identity for persons outside the party-activist spectrum as well.

[114] The term "below" refers mainly to the socio-economic conditions but is also related to the topographical difference between "upper" bazaar places, and "lower"lying tea and *bastī* - areas (compare the idiom of *talako keṭāharu,* Chapter 7).

While in this context the demand for a land (*jagā*) refers to a symbolic dimension of space in form of an "address", for tea workers it equally relates to the material dimension of land, expressed in the following statement of a female worker:

> We don't have our own land. We need our own land so we cannot be evicted. The [tea] factory would be in our own land, the children could get educated. Right now everything is in Bengal's hand. (interview, 20.5.2012)

This statement points at the relation of the question of land to legal land-ownership of workers. Labourers' houses are built on the plantation land which is in possession of the West Bengal State, so that they do not possess any legal land-ownership papers. By law only plantation labourers' families are allowed to dwell on this land, while those who are not working must find a different place to stay. Although this rule is practically dysfunctional in Darjeeling (see Chapter 1) the insecure feeling pertains. Coupled with memories of the evictions of Nepali-speakers from Bhutan since the late 1980s (the so called Lhotshampa) and of violent displacements of Nepalis from other North-Eastern States (see Chapter 3), particularly men stressed that the creation of Gorkhaland would make the land on which their houses are build legally as "their own". This would protect them from evictions from both, the plantations and from India. Such concerns lend a material dimension to the demand for a "homeland", which complements politicians' emphasis on the symbolic dimension of an "own" space.

Another difference between tea labourers' and politicians' construction of Darjeeling as an ethno-scape was the former's emphasis on a historical appropriation of the land, in contrast to politicians' claim that the Gorkhas formed an indigenous population (cf. Besky 2013, 139). Many workers described Darjeeling as a place, where their ancestors had migrated to and had planted tea (thus *after* the British acquirement of Darjeeling). This narrative often includes descriptions of Darjeeling as covered with a thick forest full of wild animals which had to be cut-down in hard labour to clear it for the tea plantations. Such stories of the appropriation of the land reflect memories of the *Britishko pālo* (see Chapter 3). This fits to Besky's (2013) observation of a togetherness of land, migration, and labour in the eyes of many plantation workers (ibid. 151). Chettri (2013) adds an ethnic component to this togetherness: she argues that in the process of 19th century labour migration the ethnic background of migrants coincided with their class position. Accordingly, workers see economic deprivation as "inadvertently related to ethnicity" (ibid. 5). This suggests a conflation of ethnic and class identities.

Besides the historical memories of labour migration and land appropriation, also the first Gorkhaland movement and *chhyāsī* ('86) form a shared memory amongst plantation residents (see Chapter 3). There is hardly a village in Darjeeling that did not experience fights and killings between the GNLF

and CPI-M cadres. Various memorials dedicated to the victims of the agitation, often decorated with a *khukurī,* keep such memories alive, and function as spatial markers of a territorialised memory (cf. Smith 1996d)[115].

When it came to the question of the territorial boundaries of the demanded Gorkhaland State, however, respondents were often confused and lacked a clear geographic imagination. Instead they pointed at the "leaders" (*netā*) who would know the answer. Most of them simply claimed that Gorkhaland should be created where Gorkhas/Nepalis lived. Reflecting a strong feeling of being different from the plains and the Bengalis in terms of language and culture, most also agreed on boundaries between Gorkhaland and the Bengali dominated plains. Yet, when asked about the Dooars, most had difficulties to explain why these should be included in Gorkhaland. A few respondents had vague ideas about Nepalis previously beeing in majority there, and suggested to "re-claim" the land from other groups who "came later". Some people mentioned similarities with the adivasis, many of whom were also working on the tea plantations, suggesting an awareness of being of the same socio-economic class. Most people, however, did not have any personal connections to the Dooars and had actually never travelled there.

4.5.2 Gorkhaland "for the rich only": Critical voices

Although a majority of people I asked about Gorkhaland saw in it the solution to socio-economic and political identity-problems, a few respondents were more critical about its redemptive promises. Some elderly female workers, for instance, distanced themselves from the leaders' rhetoric by introducing their accounts of Gorkhaland with: "They say". When I asked them who "they" refered to, one woman mentioned the "King of Darjeeling, Bimal Gurung". Such ironic statements expressed their doubts about the trustworthiness of the GJM's presidents' promises and at the same time positioned them in a feudal hierarchy ("King")[116]. One male labourer described Gorkhaland as a "fairy tale", which would never come true, expressing an increasing degree of resignation on politician's inability to bring the new State (see also Chapter 5). Others also doubted whether Gorkhaland would actually bring about the envisaged changes. One female worker explained:

> Even if there was Gorkhaland we still would have to work here. We are the ones on the floor/ground (*bhūīko*), we can never climb up. We don't care about Gorkhaland. But if there was Gorkhaland it would be good, we say it would be nice for our children. (7.5.2012)

[115] Political parties keep these memories alive in the yearly Martyr's Day (27 July), where the fighters of the movement are remembered in public meetings and ceremonies.
[116] Importantly, Subash Ghisingh had been referred to as the "King of the hills", and even called himself so (see Chapter 5).

An elderly woman underlined that she was more concerned with the plantation labour than the statehood and doubted whether Gorkhaland was able to bring about an improvement on the plantation:

> We don't care about Gorkhaland. *Gorkhaland-Sorkhaland ke ke bhanchha.* [They say Gorkhaland or whatever]. We care about whether the proprietor (*mālik*) will give us facilities and wages. (4.5.2012)

Also other persons doubted whether Gorkhaland would actually bring about improvements of their socio-economic condition. A 25-years old driver claimed that Gorkhaland would only hold benefits for educated persons. "I will still be a driver and have to see how to earn money. There won't be any benefits for less-educated persons, it will be the same like now." Also another man claimed that Gorkhaland would be "for the rich only" while "people like him" would remain the same.

Some of these doubts might stem from the perceived social gap between political leaders, who in the popular imagination became richer during the statehood movement, and the common people, who remained in the same state of socio-economic deprivation (see Chapter 5). But the material benefits of statehood were doubted. Some also questioned the identity-providing function of Gorkhaland. Kundan, a 30 years old shopkeeper, explained that an own State would provide respect and a government that speaks on behalf of those discriminated against, but added:

> I don't believe in *jāti* [ethnic group] identity. Look at the Marwaris, they don't have an own State but they don't have any identity problems. Persons get big posts, no matter whether they are Gorkhas or not. (8.7.2012)

Although such critical accounts are not very common they show that some people's priorities and interpretations differ from politicians' accounts.

4.5.3 Development versus identity?

The above description underlines that tea plantation workers/residents' accounts only partly reflected the rhetoric of political elites. Similarities were found regarding the feeling of being "different" from the rest of West Bengal and from Nepal and apprehensions towards the State government in Kolkata, which is perceived as neglecting and exploiting Darjeeling, culminated in a feeling of social, political, and economic marginality. Respondents also often connected the question of their "Indian identity" to the statehood demand, and some persons reiterated the political rhetoric that a State of their own would put an end to their perceived insecure status in the Indian nation.

Unlike politicians, however, tea labourers connected statehood intimately with an improvement of their labour condition (or the "moral economy", cf. Besky 2013) in the broader context of the plantation economy. This indicates the situatedness of their imagination in their socio-economic context. Expressing a strong feeling of inferiority, labourers intimately related the statehood demand to hopes of social and economic upliftment. These were not only expressed in an improvement of the labour-conditions (i.e. improved salaries, facilities, and restoration of plantation land) but also in their longing for employment opportunities *outside* the plantation, which would enable their children to live independently from tea labour.

In contrast to such material and social-status aspirations, most political elites emphasised the "identity crisis" and – except for the CPRM – even usually excluded the labour question from their accounts. The GJM's non-commitment to the labour agenda is underlined by the fact that neither the '86 nor the recurrent movement for Gorkhaland seriously challenged the general principles of Darjeeling's tea economy (Besky 2013, 140). Ironically, the GJM's prioritisation of the identity-question over labour issues was underlined by P.T. Sherpa, the president of the GJM's tea plantation labour union. In front of party-workers at a GJM meeting[117] he even condemned labour issues as hindering the accomplishment of Gorkhaland:

> I appeal to all people. We should not be fighting for petty things like money for firewood, slippers, shoes or baskets. Because petty/unworthy (*masino khudre*) 'politics' [Engl.] causes problems for the organisation. We should be satisfied with what we have and focus on our main aim: Gorkhaland. (speech at Gymkhana/Darjeeling, 14.6.2012)

Against this backdrop, the initial question of why tea plantation labourers expressed their demands for socio-economic upliftment in the ethno-regional language of Gorkhaland instead of engaging in a class-based labour movement comes back to mind. This question itself, however, might be misleading, as my discussion showed that such clear-cut divisions between ethnic and class-identities are not applicable in the described context. Respondents regarded their economic status as an outcome of a discriminative policy of "outsider" Bengalis on the plantations, and of a neglecting state policy of the "Bengali" government. Coupled with the historical conflation of ethnic and class-identities (see Chettri 2013, cited above), ethnicity (and not class) becomes the explanation for exploitation and governmental neglect. The boundaries between "class" and "ethnic" identity are blurred. Thus, for workers it is logical to engage in an ethnic-based movement, which promises them "their own land" for self-realisation outside of the perceived exploitation of the West Bengal State. In this sense, the way labourers imagine Gorkhaland translates their "class"-based concerns into an

[117] This meeting had been called to publicly condemn the areal recommendations for the GTA of the Sen Committee and re-emphasised the GJM's struggle for Gorkhaland.

ethnic agenda. Therefore, it is not a movement in the name of class but the ethno-regional idea of Gorkhaland, which expresses people's dreams and aspirations.

The statehood discourse does not *replace* the labour discourse but subsumes it under its dominant ethnic rhetoric, fostered through reference to "deep resources" (Smith 1996b) of ethnic identity[118]. Gorkhaland conveys imaginations of a better life and is regarded as the solution to all problems. It is this intersection of such emotionally laden ethnic elements with these utopian traits that makes the idea of Gorkhaland so appealing to a majority. It underlines that this demand is not emerging from the need to "avoid" the state (Scott 2009) but as a way to become more fully incorporated into it (cf. Karlsson 2013). At the same time, the statehood imaginary reminds people of their fuzzy relationship to the Indian nation, and keeps "anxieties of belonging" alive. Together, this makes it a powerful tool for political elites to justify their existence.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the question of why the idea of Gorkhaland is so appealing to the Nepali-speaking majority of Darjeeling, and in how far the vision of a separate State for the Gorkhas relates to people's subjectivities and identities. To approach these issues the chapter first analysed the construction of Gorkhaland by politicians. Drawing on the concepts of imaginative geographies, regionalisation, and Smith's "deep resources" of ethnicity (Radcliffe 1998; Paasi 2002a; Smith 1996b; Reuber 1999), it showed that political elites attempt to strategically design Darjeeling as an ethno-scape and to frame regional identities. I contrasted such constructions with the meanings Gorkhaland holds for those in whose names the new State is being demanded, i.e. tea plantation workers and dwellers. The analysis underlined that Gorkhaland attains much of its mobilising appeal from the ways Gorkha politicians construct it (i) as an ethno-scape of Gorkhas, which connects selected "deep resources" of nationalism (cf. Smith 1996b) and versions of the places' history to the claimed territory; (ii) as an integral part of an imagined Indian nation expressed through the mobilisation of a "pan-Indian grammar" (Baruah 1999), which legitimises the statehood demand with reference to principles of Indian nationalism; and (iii) as a solution to all identity, security, and socio-economic problems the Indian Gorkhas are facing. In constructing such images, politicians' draw on available "deep resources" of ethno-nationalism, such as a historical understanding of people's relation to the land or shared memories. They shape and mobilise these to create an emotional attachment to the imagination of Gorkhaland. Through the combination of these images politicians

[118] Importantly, this blurring of boundaries was supported by the bad associations people still hold towards the CPI-M/CPI, which had emphasised the class-identity prior to the first Gorkhaland movement (see Chapter 3).

design Gorkhaland as a utopian vision which draws on deeply held "anxieties of belonging" (cf. Middleton 2013b, 609), issues that were also prevalent in accounts of various tea plantation workers.

This analysis complements the initially introduced understanding of the construction of ethnic identity, which reduces it as a means to gain political and economic benefits, and as an instrument in political elites' struggles for state resources (see Chapter 1) by unveiling the emotional attachment of people to place. Politicians cater to this emotional base in their rhetoric of the ethno-scape. This underlines that ethnic consciousness is shaped and reinforced in the interplay between people's emotions, aspirations, and imaginations on the one hand, and politicians' rhetoric frames as devices to explain the world and present a solution to stylised problems on the other. This intersection does not only sustain the demand for Gorkhaland over time but also makes it a handy tool for old and new politicians to legitimise their existence (see Chapter 5). The inability of alternative geographical imaginations of Darjeeling to challenge the Gorkhaland imagination underlines its hegemony amongst the Nepali-speaking groups of Darjeeling. This ultimately shrinks the possibilities to gain a political hold in Darjeeling for those, who promote differing visions that lack reference to the "identity crisis" or Gorkha-ethnic identity.

A second aspect of the imaginative geography of Gorkhaland concerns its relation to identities. The analysis revealed that indeed the imagination of Gorkhaland expresses what Radcliffe (1998) had called "geographies of identities". It positions citizens in relation to an imagined Indian nation while drawing on their awareness as a unique ethnic group as Gorkhas. The imagination does not stop short at this point but rather – in combination with its utopian appeal – simultaneously coveys a vision for an anticipated future "geographies of identities" in an "own" State. In this sense, Gorkhaland expresses political subjectivities in form of an increasingly "aware citizenry" posing demands towards the state (see Chapter 1). Gorkhaland becomes the vehicle for public aspirations for justice, freedom from exploitation, and national recognition. Importantly, such aspirations for a "better life" as part of the struggle for autonomy are formulated towards the state only but not directed towards their own, regional leaders. I contend that by making the state the sole and main enemy of the group, the imagination of Gorkhaland indirectly obscures the role of the regional leaders in maintaining the socio-economic and political conditions in Darjeeling against which people are protesting, a claim I will undergird in the following chapters.

Importantly, the comparison between politicians' and plantation residents' accounts also uncovered differences in the way these groups advertise or imagine Gorkhaland. While politicians emphasise the "identity"-providing abilities of Gorkhaland; labourers stressed material, socio-economic, and developmental needs including the question of legal land-ownership. Thus, politicians referred

mainly to the "symbolic" and labourers to the "material" dimension of the demanded land. Further, tea plantation labourers emphasise their historical relation to the land, i.e. during the process of labour migration and the establishment of tea economy, while politicians prioritise the indigeneity of the Gorkhas. Thus, while the former regard the ethno-scape as *historically appropriated,* the latter design it (mainly) as *primordially inherited.* This obvious mismatch between political elites' and plantation residents' imaginations of Darjeeling has serious consequences for the representative and inclusive function of the imagination of Gorkhaland as promoted by politicians.

Although my discussion has shown that workers "chose" (cf. Chettri 2013) to voice the question of labour through the ethno-regional rhetoric, for them the boundaries between class and ethnic consciousness are blurred. Politicians' emphasis on the "identity crisis" in their imagination of Gorkhaland reflects their neglect of this labour question[119]. I conclude that ultimately the complex and contradictory conglomerate of developmental, labour, and ethnic identity-questions in the broader context of relations to the state and to Indian nationalism, coupled with the political elites' need to sustain a public movement, results in the marginalisation of the issues, which are of utmost importance for those who struggle to meet their ends in the tea economy. Ironically, the perception that the autonomous councils (DGHC, GTA) have not delivered the promised developmental benefits (see Chapters 5, 6 and 8) proves a handy tool for the ruling politicians to continue claiming that only a separate State can address people's grievances. But despite the discrepancies between political leaders' and workers' imaginations of Gorkhaland, and the latter's ignorance of the labour question, the majority of them continue to lend support to the ruling party. This suggests that the appeal of the ruling party cannot be explained with reference to the ethno-regional agenda alone and points at the importance of other factors which are subject to discussion in the following chapters.

[119] Besky (2013) claims that political elites' neglect of the "moral economy" (which in her view leads to the Gorkhaland movements' failure to address the problems of labours) stems from their emphasis on the primordial relation of Gorkhas to the land (ibid. 21, 37). This account however fails to explain why politicians' (strategic and rhetoric) emphasis on primordial ties should hinder them to (practically) address the current labour question of their main constituents, e.g. via their tea labour union. I propose that in view of the party-political nature of the "movement" (see Chapter 1) it makes sense to assume that the neglect of the labour question is more related to the economic ties between the tea proprietors and the ruling party (see Chapter 6).

5 Changing parties, changing leaders, and the role of reputation

5.1 Introduction

The foregoing chapters underlined the suitability of the Gorkhaland imagination as a tool for political mobilisation because of its widespread emotional appeal amongst the Nepali-speaking majority of Darjeeling. The imagination of Gorkhaland does not only express people's longing for national recognition but also aspirations for justice, liberation, and participation formulated towards the state. In this way, it shapes and re-shapes political subjectivities. Despite differences between the political leaders' emphasis on the "identity crisis" and the rather socio-economically grounded aspirations of tea workers, most people shared the belief that Gorkhaland (and not any other demand) was the solution to all problems, both identity and development related. In the following chapters, I will explore how the GJM as a new party since October 2007 established its dominance against the backdrop of such justice-seeking public.

So far, the discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 suggested that the GJM and other regional parties draw their normative legitimacy (and public support) largely from the ethno-regional rhetoric. In this and the following two chapters I will relativise this impression by exploring other factors, which equally account for public support to the GJM. These factors broadly reflect the three pillars of authoritarian rule (co-optation/patronage, repression, and legitimacy) introduced in Chapter 1 although – as I will show – the boundaries between these three pillars cannot be drawn as sharply. To begin this exploration, this chapter concentrates on the role of a leader's reputation in gaining support. I ask why since October 2007 a majority in Darjeeling decided to lend support to Bimal Gurung, at that time prominent GNLF leader and DGHC councillor, and not to any other Gorkha leader (like Madan Tamang of AIGL or R.B. Rai of CPRM).

To answer this question I first recall the events that led to Ghisingh's overthrow in 2007 and 2008. In Chapter 5.2 I review the story of the GJM's emergence and explore what factors made people switch sides from the GNLF to the GJM and why the GJM became the main voice of Gorkhaland. I then ask why it was only Bimal Gurung and not any other leader or outfit, who could garner majority support of the population. Drawing on the concepts of reputation/"reputation management" (Bailey 1971) and studies on leadership in South Asia (Alm 2006; Price and Ruud 2010a) I introduce a three-fold categorisation of leadership types (or "masks", cf. Bailey 1971) (Chapter 5.3). This helps me to analyse Gurung's reputation as one explanatory factor for his popular appeal at the critical juncture in 2007 (Chapter 5.4). Although Bimal Gurung resembles what has been described as "charismatic leader" (Madsen and Snow 1991; Eatwell 2006), I show that it was not only his ability to draw on the

Gorkhaland demand but also his reputation as muscleman and able social worker that made people support him before other leaders. In Chapter 5.4.2 I then analyse the forms of "reputation management" (Bailey 1971) Gurung and his associates used to maintain his image and contrast it with public expectations and perceptions of his leadership after 2007. The conclusion outlines fractures in the image of the leader after the GJM presumably compromised on the statehood agenda.

5.2 A "critical juncture": From Gurung to Ghisingh

I now continue the narrative of political events in Darjeeling from Chapter 3, and turn to a more detailed account of the events and context factors, which led to the downfall of Subash Ghisingh and the GNLF and the rise of Bimal Gurung and the GJM between 2005 and 2007/08. In Chapter 1 I had identified these events as a "critical juncture", which opened up possibilities of change of the dominant party regime in Darjeeling. I complement information from newspaper articles (mainly from *The Telegraph*, between September 2007 and July 2008) with accounts of journalists, intellectuals, party-workers, and followers collected between 2011 and 2013 to derive a more comprehensive story.

When in 2007 Bimal Gurung challenged Subash Ghisingh and established the new outfit GJM as a new alternative to the GNLF, political change had long been overdue in Darjeeling. Recalling the GNLF-rule, in interviews and conversations many persons expressed their disappointment with Ghisingh and other DGHC-councillors who instead of providing socio-economic upliftment of the masses "ate" the money to cater to their "selfish" needs. In explaining Ghisingh's overthrow, one commenter pointed out that after the establishment of DGHC a new generation of young unemployed men had grown up, whose jealous aspirations to benefit from the council could not be met by the GNLF. On top of that, in December 2005, Ghisingh had secretly signed a Memorandum of Settlement with the central and State government to bring the three Darjeeling hill-subdivisions and some additional *mouzas* in the Terai under the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution (see Chapter 4). The related attempts to render Darjeeling "tribal" by interfering into people's ways of religious worship and the political undertone of such attempts further alienated the masses (see Chapter 3).

The agreement, which read "full and final" increased doubts about his proclaimed Gorkhaland agenda. Opposition groups also heavily criticised it on the ground that it would jeopardise the Gorkhas' unity by privileging government-recognised "scheduled tribes" before other groups. An insider commented: "People thought it was a conspiracy of the government" as Ghisingh, probably

sensing the public mood turning against him, utilised the agreement to justify withholding elections to the DGHC and to the *gram panchayats* (scheduled for 2004 and 2005 respectively). After in March 2005 all DGHC councillors had resigned, the State government appointed him the non-elected "caretaker chairman" of the council while drawing on a provision in the DGHC Act [120] (*The Hindu,* 20.3.2005; *TT,* 24.3.2005).

At the same time Ghisingh became more distanced and his public appearances became lesser. Some even hold that he became paranoid or mad. Ghisingh, who had always made sure that no other GNLF leader came close to him, became increasingly isolated. Such accounts also suggest Ghisingh's loss of normative legitimacy due to his perceived diversion from the Gorkhaland agenda and of factual legitimacy due to his inability to deliver socio-economic improvements in view of the majority. Instead, Ghisingh increasingly relied on repression for ruling (compare Chapter 3). But despite the public dissatisfaction and anger, nobody succeeded in mobilising the masses against him. People wanted change – but nobody dared to openly oppose Ghisingh fearing victimisation or death.

Prashant Tamang and the Indian Idol competition

The long-awaited trigger to overthrow Ghisingh came from a rather unexpected incident. In 2007, Prashant Tamang, a Darjeeling-based youngster employed with the Kolkata police, participated in the "*Indian Idol*" reality show. His struggle in this *Indian* singing-competition, screened on national TV, mesmerised the masses. Beyond Darjeeling, Nepalis worldwide established Prashant-fan-clubs and collected money to vote him (via SMS) to the next rounds of the competition. While Subash Ghisingh's silence on Prashant further alienated the masses, Bimal Gurung (at that time a GNLF leader and former DGHC councillor) sensed the pulse and started supporting the Prashant-wave financially and organisationally[121]. Pravesh*, a supporter of Prashant, who later became a high-level GJM leader, recalled:

> Financially we were crushed; we needed someone to help us. We decided to meet Mr Bimal Gurung [...] because he was a kind of a person who could understand the feeling of young people [...]. He is a genuine [...] person with a big heart, willing to help anyone. Luckily he accepted. And we made him president of the Prashant Fan Club. [...] So Mr Gurung was the main person to receive Prashant Tamang in [Darjeeling] [...]. Thousands of people came to cheer for Prashant. (interview, 10.4.2012)

More and more people got hooked with the Fan Club, enabling Gurung to use it for mobilisation and networking. Some respondents recalled that it was initially non-political, but slowly became a platform for opposition to Ghisingh. Many people also remember the "unity" and emotional

[120] The 1994 amendment of the DGHC Act formally entitled the State government to do so (Sarkar 2013, 83).
[121] For examples by distributing phone vouchers in value of 1.5 lakh to people (*TT,* 8.9.2007).

excitement of these days[122]. Prashant's victory in the competition on September 23, 2007 was not only a victory for the Nepalis but also for Bimal Gurung, who denied other leaders the right to capitalise on the victory (*TT*, 25.9.2007). Subsequent blessings from Ghisingh and other GNLF leaders appeared to come too late.

The festive mood took an abrupt end when a Delhi-based Radio jockey asked who the *chaukidār* (watchman) would be if all Nepalis became Indian Idols. Feeling reduced to the stereotype of the *chaukidār* Gorkha (see Chapter 4), this comment sparked wide protests in the hills and triggered clashes of Prashant fans with locals in Siliguri that left more than 50 people injured (*TT*, 28./29.9.2007)[123]. In the name of the Prashant Fan Club, Bimal Gurung (and not the GNLF) called a one day *bandh* in Darjeeling hills, demanding "strong action" against the FM station (*TT*, 29.9.2007). In addition to the political crisis in Darjeeling, this incident reminded the Gorkhas of their "anxious belonging" (cf. Middleton 2013b) to the Indian nation. Apparently, winning the *Indian Idol* competition was not sufficient to address their resurfacing "identity crisis".

Gurung challenges Ghisingh

Meanwhile, on 1st October 2007, the union cabinet approved of the 6th Schedule status and announced the formation of a new "Gorkha Hill Council" once the parliament passes the bill (*TT*, 2.10.2007). While the GNLF was celebrating the cabinet approval "with gun wielding bodyguards in tow" (ibid.), for Gurung this was the signal to openly challenge Ghisingh. Claiming that people should accept "nothing short of Gorkhaland", he called upon the youth to join him in a peaceful and democratic agitation while announcing that he was ready to sacrifice his live for the benefit of the hill people (*TT*, 3.10.2007). After Gurung's public challenge, the All Gorkha Student Union (AGSU) led by Roshan Giri and the AIGL followed suit and supported the statehood demand at public meetings at Kurseong motor stand and Darjeeling Chowk Bazaar (*TT*, 6.10.2007).

On October 4, Bimal Gurung was expelled from the GNLF for "anti-party activities" while the GNLF and Ghisingh – returning from a two-week-long "study trip" to Indonesia – announced a public meeting to advertise the 6th Schedule (*TT*, 5.10.2007)[124]. Unimpressed, on Sunday, 7th October 2007, Bimal Gurung founded the Gorkha People's Liberation Front (GJM) at a public meeting attended by

[122] *The Telegraph* correspondent Vivek Chettri commented: "his [Prashant Tamang's] voice cut across differences in class, politics and nationality to unite the entire hill people and help them forge new relationships with others" (*TT,* 24.9.2007).
[123] Allegedly a procession of around 2,000 fans of Prashant marching to the sub-divisional office to file a memorandum against the Delhi-based radio jockey had blocked the way of an ambulance. Locals protest against this erupted in a fight between the two groups.
[124] Gurung on the other hand claimed that he had never been a member of GNLF but a publicly elected DGHC representative of his constituency Singmari/Tukvar.

more than 20,000 people at Darjeeling motor stand. K.S. Ramudamu, the president of the *Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Anushuti Jati Sangh* (SC association) representing about 9.7 percent of the hill population (SC), presided over the meeting, expressing the SC apprehensions over the 6th Schedule bill as this threatened to privilege only groups classified as "scheduled tribes" (ST). Also AGSU lent support (*TT*, 8.10.2007); its leader Roshan Giri later became General Secretary of the GJM. Insiders underlined the importance of these alliances for establishing an initial base in Darjeeling. Within five weeks after the GJM's establishment, the GNLF affiliated student's front switched sides. The alliance also included non-party domains such as tribal associations, the ex-paramilitary welfare association, and the hawkers' union, who expressed their support to the new outfit. Even Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Chambling openly announced his support for Gorkhaland (*TT*, 1.11.2007). Importantly, also respected intellectuals joined the GJM hoping that Gurung – unlike Ghisingh – would seek advice from educated persons. Many of them were later accommodated in the GJM's "Study-forum". The initially inclusive and social character of the movement was underlined by the fact that the GJM was not yet a political party. Instead, Gurung described it in terms of an umbrella organisation of the *jāti,* while asking members of other hill parties to unite under the common banner till Gorkhaland was achieved (see Chapter 1). However, the organisation with its layered authority structure and frontal organisations such as labour, youth, and women's wing resembled that of a party from the beginning on. By April 2008, the GJM officially attained the status of a political party (Election Commission India 2008).

Extending the base

In the following months people joined the new outfit "like a wave" (interviews). Those advocating change met with relatively low resistance, reflecting the popular anger and dissatisfaction with the GNLF. Many founding members recalled that they did not even wait for Bimal Gurung to come to visit them but instead went to meet him on their own initiatives. After receiving GJM-flags these new party-workers convinced people back in their villages about the new outfit. In the villages themselves the decision to change affiliation to the GJM was often jointly facilitated by the *samāj* (see Chapter 1). Lending support to one party only was (and still is) thought of as a means to avoid clashes and conflicts in villages. In some places villagers also followed respectable local leaders to join the new outfit. These new party-workers helped organising various meetings where Gurung spoke against the 6th Schedule and in support of Gorkhaland. Facilitated by the establishment of frontal organisations such as the labour and youth wings the GJM managed to establish bases all over Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions. The taking over of political dominance took only longer in Kalimpong sub-division, which was a stronghold of the GNLF. Some attributed this to the fact that many GNLF

central leaders stemmed from here and also to the region's agricultural (not tea plantation) character.

By March 2008, a majority of the elected GNLF municipality members had switched sides to the GJM, which invested the party with formal authority over these governmental institutions. In an attempt to extend its control over the local bodies, too, on April 24, 2008, the *Morcha* demanded the dissolution of the *gram panchayats* (scheduled elections in 2005 had been withheld). Instead they asked for local "boards" to be established, which took the GJM into consideration (*TT*, 25.4.2008). Instead of establishing such new boards, however, the State government appointed bureaucrats as the new officers in-charge of the *gram panchayats.*

The process of overtaking power did not always proceed smoothly. The pressure of GNLF for a speedy decision on the 6th Schedule in Delhi made it the main object of contention in the following months. The party's calls for *bandhs* were spoiled by the GJM (*TT*, 5.11.2007;*TT,* 3.11.2007), which staged further protest programmes for Gorkhaland and against Ghisingh, the 6th Schedule, and alleged corruption. Part of this agitation was staging a *gherau* of DGHC's main office Lal Kothi (which was dealt with by additional forces sent to Darjeeling by the State government in the beginning of November; *TT*, 6.11.2007; *TT*, 7.11.2007), the burning of copies of the 6th Schedule bill, the initiation of long *bandhs* that spanned over multiple days, or the performance of hunger strikes in front of administrative offices (*TT*, 3.12.2007). Regular clashes between members of the GNLF and GJM often left activists injured and arrested, or houses burned (*TT*, 23.11.2007). Also in the following months clashes between GNLF and GJM activists (often over the removal of party-flags) regularly led to spontaneous *bandhs* to press for the arrest of GNLF leaders (*TT*, 25.1.2008; *TT,* 26.1.2008). The newly formed Kalimpong Citizens' Forum's request to Gurung to put an end to the *bandhs* and violence (*TT*, 31.1.2008), however, went idle[125].

The vast protests in Darjeeling, and the *Morcha*'s mobilisation of one BJP leader (*TT*, 26.11.2007) caught the attention of the central government in Delhi. On pledges of the BJP, the 6thSchedule bill was placed before a parliamentary standing committee. Deferring the bill, the committee – headed by the senior BJP leader Sushma Swaraj (Chattopadhyay 2008) – invited the Darjeeling parties for a hearing to Delhi, where they submitted a joint memorandum (excluding the AIGL and GNLF) for the creation of Gorkhaland (*TT*, 19.12.2007). The GJM also held a *dharna* in front of the parliament (*TT*, 21.12.2007). Back in Darjeeling, an optimistic Bimal Gurung publicly announced that he would create Gorkhaland by March 10, 2010, or otherwise commit suicide (*TT*, 28.12.2007).

[125]Already in November 2007, eminent intellectuals had initiated peace rallies in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, amidst initial clashes and regular *bandhs* (*TT,* 28.11., 29.11.2007).

Picture 4: Members of the *Nari Morcha* block the main road during a band at Chowk Bazaar in Darjeeling town, January 2011. On the left side is the poster-wall (*postering bhittā*), on the right side in the background the speaker's venue (*Gitaṅge Dāḍā)* (see Chapter 8). Photo by author.

To spur up the agitation and to press for Ghisingh's resignation and the State government's withdrawal of Ghisingh's support, in the following months the *Morcha* continued with its protest activities. These included the launch of a non-cooperation movement, i.e. the non-payment of taxes and electricity bills to undergird the claim that the hill-resources should remain with the people. Also post-offices and banks were closed sporadically. The GJM even established highway patrols and hindered Ghisingh, who had travelled to Delhi to re-enter Darjeeling hills in February 2008 (*TT*, 16.2.2008). More and more people joined the *Morcha*'s indefinite hunger strike to press for the sacking of Ghisingh.

Also CPRM president R.B. Rai lent support to the GJM agitation (*TT*, 22.2.2008)[126], broadening Bimal Gurung's alliance. Only AIGL leader Madan Tamang, who demanded "collective leadership" of the movement distanced himself from the GJM (*TT*, 31.12.2007, 29.1.2008). Despite being confronted with such large protests, Ghisingh – meanwhile in Kolkata – continued to refer to himself as the "king

[126] Later, also famous Naxalite leader Kanu Sanyal pledged support for the statehood demand (*The Statesman,* 2.12.2008). Also four left parties allied with the GJM (*TT* 26.2.2008).

of the hills" (*TT*, 24.2.2008). Still announcing his supremacy over the Gorkhaland-demand, he claimed: "Gorkhaland is my monkey; it will dance the way I get it to" (cited in: *The Hindu,* 15.3.2008). But eventually West Bengal CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya gave in to the public pressure and on February 29, 2008 Ghisingh had to accept the State government's condition to tender his resignation as "caretaker "of the DGHC by March 10 (Chattopadhyay 2008; *TT*, 1.3.2008). The same day, the central parliamentary standing committee recommended a re-assessment of the draft bill of 6th Schedule, and returned it to the State government, thereby postponing the process indefinitely. Confronted with the State government's withdrawal of support and the Centre's sacking of the 6th Schedule bill, eventually Ghisingh gave in. On March 5, 2008, he resigned from his post as the care-taker of DGHC, ending a nearly 20 years lasting rule. The State government placed IAS-officer B.L. Meena as caretaker to look after the affairs of the DGHC. Secured by the police, Ghisingh secretly returned to the hills on March 16, 2008 (*TT*, 17.3.2008).

Ousting of Ghisingh

With Ghisingh's resignation, the GJM now concentrated on its agitation for Gorkhaland. The party also increasingly included the Dooars in its programmes, organising political meetings (one attended by around 25,000 people, *TT*, 21.4.2008) and a two-weeks long *pada yatra* (foot march) from Darjeeling to Sunkosh (at the Assamese border)[127], which demarcated the demanded Gorkhaland area by planting flags (*TT*, 14.4.2008) (see Chapter 4). Owing to the heterogeneity of population and political groups such programmes often entailed clashes, e.g. in Siliguri, where the Bengali majority opposed to be included in a Gorkha State (*TT*, 29.4.2008; *TT*, 9.4.2008).

In Darjeeling, the GJM continued with its cleansing drive against those, who were still with the GNLF, mainly its leaders and former DGHC councillors. The GJM refused them membership in the GJM and instead asked them to leave the hills (*TT*, 5.9.2008). Various news of clashes between the two parties, and the burning and ransacking of GNLF leaders' houses (e.g. *TT*, 1.3.2008; *TT*,28.2.2008; *TT*,24.1.2008) added to accusations of social boycott and oppression of those resisting the GJM (*TT*, 12.2.2008).

In an interview, one middle-level GJM leader recalled that he received orders from upper-level party leaders to burn a house of a local GNLF leader. This suggests that such violence was not necessarily an expression of a spontaneous outbreak of anger but may also have been orchestrated by the leadership. Another friend pointed at the social pressure to participate in such violent activities, even, "if you don't like it". This and other accounts underline that many people joined the GJM

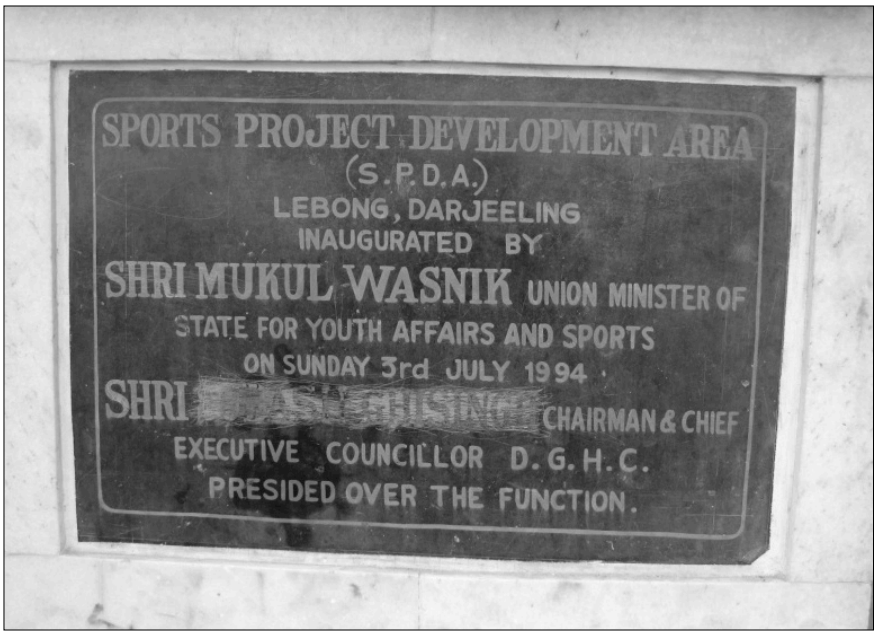
[127] This agitation was initially supported by the Kamptapur Progressive Party and the Greater Cooch Behar Party (*TT,* 29.3.2008).

because "staying with the 'majority' [Engl.] was safe" (see Chapter 7). In October 2008, when the GJM mandated the people to wear traditional Nepali attire that would represent their ethnic distinctiveness as part of the Gorkhaland agitation (see Chapter 4) and later the harsh treatment towards those, who defied this order (by smearing black colour on their faces) added to the mounting apprehensions towards the party (*TT*, 22.08.2008; *TT*, 15.10.2008). However, the GJM later changed the mandate to a "request" (Lama 2008). Also, the establishment of the Gorkhaland Personnel (GLP) in 2008, was seen with some suspicion. Purportedly, the GLP, which was getting a monthly salary from the GJM, was to provide crowd and traffic control during public party events (*TT*, 8.1.2011). They received a (military) training by ex-servicemen from the hills and lived in army-like camps. Accounts suggest that they also became active in social policing (e.g. arresting drug-dealers or punishing hand-holding couples, *TT*, 11.6.2013).

Eventually, on July 25, 2008, during a *gherau* of GNLF Darjeeling branch committee president Deepak Gurung, Pramila Sharma, a female activist was shot dead allegedly by a bullet from the politician's house. An angry mob set his house on fire and he was only able to escape with help from the police, before being arrested for alleged murder. This incident ended Subash Ghisingh's stay in Darjeeling. Fearing angry retaliation, secured by police, he left Darjeeling hills and would not return till 2011[128]. In March 2008, the GJM publicly called for the creation of a commission to investigate the corruption in the DGHC. *Yuva Morcha* activists and senior leader H.B. Chettri also demanded an end to corruption (*TT*, 12.3.2008; *TT,* 17.3.2008). Such a commission was, however, never established. Only in September 2008, Bimal Gurung asked his supporters to stop socially boycotting GNLF and CPI-M-supporters on the condition that they express their sympathy for Gorkhaland (*TT*, 1.9.2008).

Within ten months, the GJM had brought the powerful "king of the hills" to fall, ousted or silenced most of his active supporters, and destroyed signs of his existence (mainly by replacing the party flags with the new ones, or by eradicating the name of the old leader, see Picture 5). This suggests that part of the explanation for the speedy overtake was a strong anti-incumbency, which made it easy for the new GJM activists to bring people on their side. Supported by Gurung's alliances with other groups, the large-scale mobilisation eventually forced the State government to withdraw its support from Ghisingh. The use of violence against those, who refused to change their political affiliation and the perception that staying with the new majority would be safest, facilitated the overthrow.

[128] Protected by the electoral Code of Conduct, in 2011, Ghisingh held some rallies ahead of the State Assembly elections in Darjeeling. He returned to his exile in Jalpaiguri shortly after the elections after a GNLF supporter died in a clash with GJM activists. He made a new and successful attempt to re-enter Darjeeling ahead of the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections (see Chapter 8).



Picture 5: Sign board at the Lebong Stadium. Subash Ghisingh's name was erased. Picture taken in June 2012.

Although these factors explain the speed of the overtake and the way it was organised, they do not answer the question why it was Bimal Gurung and not any other leader, who led the powerful alliance against Ghisingh and thereby became the new dominant voice of the demand for Gorkhaland. In the following I argue that it was Bimal Gurung's reputation, which played a decisive role in paving the path for attaining this position.

5.3 Leaders and the role of reputation

I now introduce a framework to study the reputation of leaders. This framework evolves from the concepts of the "mask" (Bailey 1971), "reputation management" (ibid.), and a three-fold categorisation of South Asian leadership-styles (Price and Ruud 2010a)129. I use the term "leader" to refer to what people in Darjeeling call netā. These are powerful persons usually in the party-political context, who command a following amongst and beyond the party-workers. This understanding fits to Bailey's (1988) conceptualisation of leadership as "the art of controlling followers" (ibid. 5). Leaders have the capacity to "dominate" others, to make another person act in a particular way regardless of the persons' agreement to a command (ibid.; Weber 1972). According to an emic

[129] As the leaders I am concerned with in this chapter are male I only use the masculine pronoun in the following. This does not mean that women cannot take the same roles and wear the same masks.

understanding, netās in Darjeeling include local party-presidents and medium-level chair holders (such as the councillors, appointed or elected zonal presidents), besides members of the central committees and the top-level persons.

5.3.1 Reputations, masks, and the bases of authority

I now turn to the question of leaders' bases of authority and related to this, the supporters' considerations to willingly follow a certain leader. This question is based on the premise that leaders' performance is an element of the "supply- side" of political legitimacy, through which they try to cater to public demands and expectations (the "demand-side") (cf. Karateke 2005, Chapter 1). I contend that a comparison of both sides helps to answer the question of Gurung's (initial) success.

Various case-studies on leadership in South Asia underline the importance of a leader's "reputation" for gaining support. Bailey (1971) broadly defined reputation as "the opinions which other people have about" another person (ibid. 4). He also stressed that reputation can be a means of manipulation to attain other aims. Besides spreading rumours and gossip, the wearing of a "mask" is a part of what he calls "reputation management" (ibid. 5). A mask helps its wearer to present only certain sides of his personality while hiding those which might not appeal to the public (ibid. 292). It usually represents common social and moral norms and values. The contributions in Price and Ruud (2010a) show that leaders can choose amongst a wide range of such masks, conveying practical and ideological strategies appropriate for the respective domains in which they (attempt to) rule[130]. Accordingly, a study of leaders' masks helps to denominate different leadership styles and traits, which reflect differing bases of legitimacy and authority. Drawing on the empirical material from Darjeeling, I propose an analytical frame along three masks which I call: the messiah, the social worker, and the muscle man/boss[131]. Leaders usually switch between masks or can combine them according to the cause, which they claim to embody in certain situations. Thus the categorisation serves to summarise traits of leaders as ideal types and analytical devices, which in reality often appear mixed and display a situational contingency (Price and Ruud 2010b, xxx).

The messiah

Leaders can gain legitimacy by monopolising a moral aim or drawing on a cause or ideology (Bailey 1988, 56 ff.). They present themselves as saviours of society and defender of its values and sometimes gain additional legitimacy by evoking deities. I call such leaders "messiah" (cf. Arias 1995; Dogan 2009). The idea of charismatic leadership – despite its analytical flaws (Kraemer 2002; Dawson

[130] Such domains can be social movements, clans, castes, or villages (Price and Ruud 2010b, xxii).
[131] This partly resembles Price and Ruud's (2010b) categorisation of leadership-styles into "bosses, lords and captains".

2006; Eatwell 2006) – in many ways resembles this idea of leader as messiah. The concept stresses the exceptional circumstances of a charismatic leaders' rise to power, and followers' unquestionable hopes and belief in the ability of the leader to solve an actual or fabricated crisis. Charismatic leaders gain strength through their impersonation and monopolisation of a common cause (Eatwell 2006; Pinto and Larsen 2006; Wehler 2007). Coupled with a shared feeling of despair, lack of self-esteem, and coping-capability during the crisis, this creates a strong emotional dependence of followers on the leader who – if successful in solving the crisis – derives his legitimacy from his perceived exceptional and heroic abilities (Madsen and Snow 1991). People follow him because of their belief in a (moral) cause and the leaders' capability to forward this. His support is based on his monopoly "of the right to communicate with or symbolise whatever mystical value it is that holds the group's devotion" (Bailey 1969, 82). Bailey termed such supporters as a "moral team", pointing at the leaders' normative legitimacy. Defying such moral , however, Pappas (2008) points at the instrumental functions of the messiah mask. He claims that leaders draw on underlying emotions, collective memories, or national aspirations to design powerful social action frames (Snow and Benford 1988), which result in radical mass movements and help the leader to gain power (Pappas 2008, 1221). Although drawing on a cause/ideology helps a leader to rise, if the cause cannot be attained or the following loses the belief in the leaders' capability or commitment to the shared aim, he is prone to lose support and has to seek other bases of support (Bailey 1988, 57).

Social worker

A second mask often mentioned in literature on leadership in South Asia is the "social worker". Following the "general rule [that] one's reputation should be kept as close as possible to the altruistic end of the spectrum" (Bailey 1971, 283), leaders attempt to appear as generous deliverers of development, wealth, or other forms of assistance such as protection for their respective communities or clients (Alm 2006; Piliavsky 2014b; Price 2007). Although leaders can use their power for personal or party-political gain, part of the social worker mask is to make their deeds and actions appear as guided by altruist moral principles only. As altruist benefactors (Mines and Gourishankar 1990) they couch their deliveries in the rhetoric of the "gift" (Price 1989; Perera-Mubarak 2012). Thus, social workers distinguish themselves through their generosity/altruism and their (proclaimed) distance from "politics". Although such lords have and/or sometimes display the capacity of using force, violence is not regarded as a constant feature of their style (Price and Ruud 2010b, xxv).

The social worker mask caters to public expectations, which are shaped by both moral beliefs and instrumental considerations and define what a good leader and the relationship to him, should be like (Piliavsky 2014b). Various studies showed that people in South Asia expect an "ideal leader" to

be a trustworthy, selfless, and generous servant of people (Piliavsky 2014b; Alm 2006; Price 2007)[132]. Leaders' ability and readiness to distribute wealth equip them with a "moral authority" (Price 1999, 325). Their normative legitimacy (achieved through reference to altruism) is undergirded with factual measures (the effective distribution of goods and services). In contrast, if leaders are perceived selfish and greedy they will lose respect (Manor 2000; Alm 2006). People often use the expression "broker" (*dalāl*) to denounce those who are believed to deal with public goods for selfish gains (Piliavsky 2014b, 27). Yet, although the leader as social worker stresses on his moral qualities, people appear to follow him based on material or transactional considerations, too. Bailey (1969) terms such followers "transactional group" or "contract teams", where "the followers do not feel themselves beholden to the leader or to any cause as a matter of conscience but evaluate the relationship with the leader on the basis of [potential] profit." (ibid. 75).

The boss/muscle man

A third mask leaders can wear is the one of the "muscle man" or "boss" (Price and Ruud 2010b). Like the social worker also the boss can act as a middleman between followers and upper levels of power (ibid.). In contrast to the social worker, however, Price and Ruud claim that such brokerage activities appear more centred around the leaders' consideration of maintaining personal dominance, as opposed to the former's more pronounced altruistic moral considerations (ibid. xxiv). Bosses tend to be affiliated to a political party (ibid.). Further, in contrast to the social worker, their utilisation of violence to get things done is more visible, for example, by their association to criminals or *goondas* (Berenschot 2011a), or the employment of violent practices themselves. Vaishnav (2011a), for instance, underlined that criminals turned politicians use their (criminal) reputation to portray themselves as "Robin Hoods" who steal from the rich to help their communities (see also Michelutti 2008; Shani 2010). Michelluti (2010) showed that indeed a *goonda*-reputation helps politicians in North-India to appear as capable providers for their respective communities (see also Vaishnav 2012). *Goondas* hold a reputation of being physically strong, powerful, brave, and bold men, underlining their masculinity and fearlessness (Michelutti 2007). Such a reputation is not only catered through their look (e.g. sunglasses and leather jacket, ibid.) but also through performative acts of violence, which give them the image to be capable of using violence and create their "local standing". Such attitude reflects socio-cultural idioms of masculinity, often associated with Hindu Gods such as Krishna (ibid.) or Shiva (Hansen 2001).

[132] Price argues that such popular expectations are grounded in the kingly tradition of "gift-giving". In the ancient monarchical political culture (Price 1989; Price 1999), subjects believed that their well-being was dependent on discrete acts of mercy and generosity of superior beings (Price 1989, 571).

Chapter 6 will complement this discussion of the positive associations of a *goonda* reputation by displaying *goondas'* practical roles in creating party-based resource monopolies. Chapter 7 focuses on *goondas'* roles in generating the image of a "strongman" party coupled with means of hard repression.

5.3.2 The real world and moral norms

This overview suggested that leaders can wear different masks to meet socially held imaginations of an "ideal leader" grounded in social norms, values, and aspirations. The diversity of such aspirations, which reflect both transactional and moral considerations underlines that leaders have to change their masks or wear several at one time in order to respond to changing needs and contexts. For instance, followers might shift their bases of support from moral to transactional considerations, when a leader is perceived too egoistic (Bailey 1969, 45). Leaders can meet such challenges by staging rituals "of collective solidarity" instead of using resources to reward dissatisfied followers (ibid.), thereby trying to re-attain moral authority. This suggests that the switching of masks indicates differing or changing bases of their authority and legitimacy.

It is, however, not granted that leaders' attempts to present themselves in certain ways are always successful. Bailey outlined a dilemma of leaders by pointing at the real world challenges, which a leader can often only meet by exempting himself from the moral values and normative constraints of a society (i.e. not to break the law) (Bailey, 1988). This can raise doubts about his moral integrity. Yet Bailey claims that "virtuous leaders" (who live up to such normative constraints) are prone to be ineffective (ibid. 169) (underlining the claim that a "criminal" reputation can serve a leader to gain authority, as discussed above).

A second dilemma concerns notions of equality and individuality. Even when leaders (particularly as social workers) attempt to appear equal with their followers, notions of individuality and agency suggest their superiority over others (Mines and Gourishankar 1990). Although such notions serve the leader to gain a reputation of a capable agent, his failure to deliver to growing constituencies and rising expectations as opposed to perceived wealth and power can contradict the image of a selfless leader (ibid.; Hachhethu 2008). Such notions of selfishness and corruption express what Alm (2006) described as an "anti-individualistic critique" (ibid. 225, 239).

Thus, although wearing certain masks helps leaders to cover moral trespasses and keep hopes for factual deliveries up, people might not perceive them as what they wish to present themselves as (ibid. 206). Drawing on the three-fold classification of leaders' masks (messiah, social worker, and boss) I now turn to the question of why people approved of Bimal Gurung as the new representative of the Gorkhaland demand, and review the factors that resulted in his rise to power in Darjeeling.

5.4 The reputation of Bimal Gurung

Bimal Gurung was born in 1964 to tea garden workers in Tukvar, situated on a slope north of Darjeeling town (see Map, p. xxi). He had joined the struggle for Gorkhaland in the 1980s as a member of the GNLF's militant Gorkha Volunteers Cell (see Chapter 3). Accounts hold that after the agitation he engaged himself as a contractor, before he won the by-polls of the Singmari/Tukvar-DGHC constituency as an independent candidate and subsequently became member of the GNLF in 1999. Unlike Ghisingh he never pursued higher education (as he says because he had to provide for his family; interview in: Sharma 2012). In 2007, besides Bimal Gurung there were two other prominent political leaders in the hills: Madan Tamang, president of the AIGL and R.B. Rai, president of the CPRM. Unlike Gurung, both were regarded as educated and politically experienced, and had fought in the opposition against Ghisingh for many years[133]. To explain why it was Gurung, whom people followed before other leaders, I now describe the elements of Bimal Gurung's reputation. I begin with a review of opinions people held about him during the initial stages of the revived Gorkhaland movement in 2007 and 2008. In the second section I analyse how Gurung involved in "reputation management" during and after 2007 by drawing on the masks of the messiah, strong man, and social worker. I contrast these attempts with their perceptions amongst the "ruled".

5.4.1 Gurung in 2007: Reputation and resources

Accounts from various respondents (including party-insiders, intellectuals, and followers/activists) suggests that there were two factors explaining Gurung's rise: (i) his available resources (in form of knowledge/networking, and finances), and (ii) his reputation as a generous, strong, and capable leader. Shyam*, a regional expert with a long-time overview of hill politics, explained that Gurung's political involvement in the GNLF had allowed him to get into contact with a variety of local and medium-level leaders throughout Darjeeling. "It is a small-area politics [...]. A leader [like Gurung] would personally know each and every important guy in all the villages here" (interview, 4.3.2012). Unlike Ghisingh, who had to build up such connections before mobilising people during the 1980s, Gurung's already existing networks allowed him to convince people without the tedious travel to each and every place. Instead, people came to meet him (interviews). Further, his economic activities as a contractor (and probably also as a councillor) provided him with an initial economic base for his endeavour. There are also rumours claiming that Gurung and his band of strongmen were sometimes "employed" by politicians in Sikkim before and during elections. Rajesh*, an insider, stressed that once Bimal Gurung started overtaking power, various contractors came to him to pledge their loyalty (in form of donations) in order to increase their prospects to win tenders for potential developmental

[133] R.B. Rai had been Member of Parliament from 1996 to 1998, elected on a CPI-M ticket.

projects. He also claimed that the tea plantation proprietors initially gave (and still give) large amounts of money to Gurung, because "they had some issues with Ghisingh" (Gurung heavily denies such allegations, interview, 7.7.2012).

Also Madan Tamang, like Gurung commanded sufficient economic resources, and R.B. Rai's CPRM could possibly have expanded its existing party network. Yet, none of the leaders managed to win a larger support base. This points at the importance of the second factor, Gurung's reputation. Shyam pointed out: "The image is very important here for a leader [...]. You have to be a leader who has all the means, the boys and the *goons* and everything under your disposal" (interview, 4.3.2012).

Various accounts suggest that Bimal Gurung's reputation in 2007 consisted of three elements: (i) his capability of using violence or "muscle" power, and related to this (ii) his strength, braveness, capability, and straightforwardness, and (iii) his generosity as an accessible social worker. All these are influenced by Gurung's personal history and its perception by the population. While people in Darjeeling town and the surrounding areas had already heard about Gurung long before he challenged Ghisingh, others only learned about him during the Prashant Tamang campaign (see above). Accordingly, accounts differ in their emphasis.

Most respondents from Darjeeling town pointed at Gurung's reputation as a strongman. They recalled that Bimal Gurung was Subash Ghisingh's "man for the day-to-day business" and his "right-hand" and "muscleman". Journalist Niraj Lama stressed that it was in fact not so much Ghisingh but Bimal Gurung who was feared: "He was the scariest man in the hills" (interview, 14.5.2013). Also Rajesh described Bimal as the person, who "can collect all sorts of elements and can create fear amongst people". He was the one to beat up people and to enforce *bandhs* in town. "Everybody knew him" (Shyam, interview, 4.3.2012).

The open display of violence served Gurung to underline this strongman reputation. Also his origin from Tukvar tea garden, which town people consider as "dangerous" contributed to people's fear attributed to him, exacerbated by general apprehensions towards the lower-lying tea plantation areas and their inhabitants, whom town-people often regard as uneducated and violent (see Chapter 7). Shyam held this strong-man reputation functional for the rise of the GJM and the establishment of the majority:

> The hard core, the 'muscle power' [Engl.] you need for the day-to-day thing [was with Bimal Gurung]. So that's how it started. The town people, his area [Tukvar] and the Lebong valley support him. And he had a huge public meeting here in October 2007. And then [...] he took all his supporters and went to specific tea-gardens. And seeing so many supporters behind him people said 'Ok, he is the man. There are so many people following him.' (interview 4.3.2012)

Against this backdrop in 2007, there had actually not been a real change of power but simply a change of the colours of the flag as Ghisingh's muscle-power had always been with Gurung. Rajesh sadly admitted:

> People saw that Bimal is the last man of Ghisingh. If he challenges the leadership then he will go. Otherwise other leaders did not have that kind of background. But we never thought that he would be a good alternative to Ghisingh [...]. This is the tragedy, irony [...]. People had to choose between two devils [saying] why don't we support the devil with more power so that we can remain safe? (interview, 22.3.2012)

Such accounts raise the question of whether the town-people supported Gurung for the cause of Gorkhaland or simply out of fear. However, they underline that Bimal Gurung was considered the only capable leader to challenge Ghisingh – exactly because of his strongman reputation.

Binita*, a shopkeeper, who had initially joined the GJM female wing *Nari Morcha,* stressed that Gurung's reputation of being "rowdy" made him appear as a person, who does what he says. She added that he was "young and full of energy". People believed that he "would bring Gorkhaland for sure. Because he is young, he is a right person – […] a straight person, not tricky." Another GJM activist (outside of Darjeeling town) described him as a straight and trustworthy person, who does not promise what he cannot hold. Such accounts underline that Gurung held a reputation as an honest, brave, young, and strong leader and indicates that despite the fear initiated by rumours about his deeds as Ghisingh's henchman, his strongman reputation actually helped him to gain support amongst people, who held him capable for achieving Gorkhaland and to bring about the long-awaited end to Ghisingh's rule. As another local GJM leader put it: "We were waiting for the right person to challenge Subash Ghisingh" (interview, June 2012).

The second side to Gurung's reputation points at his image as a genuine social worker and accessible leader. Various persons even outside of Darjeeling town and surrounding areas had heart about his "good work" in his constituency Tukvar, where he had successfully generated employment for the unemployed youth and managed to restrict drug-abuse, alcoholism, and robberies. He was also known for maintaining law and order during *melas* (fairs) by punishing drunkards with his group of strongmen. This reputation was propped up by stories of his welfare activities, e.g. the distribution of money to needy people. Gurung's financial support to the Prashant Tamang agitation, which Urmila Rumba, central leader of the *Nari Morcha* claimed he "paid from his own pocket" (interview, 3.4.2012) underlines this image of the generous leader.

Unlike Ghisingh, Gurung was and is further perceived as an accessible leader with a sympathetic ear for people. One female activist underlined that he as a son of tea garden workers was one of them and was able to understand problems of poor people (interview, 18.5.2012).

These accounts underline that it was a combination of strongman reputation with perceptions of braveness and generosity (social worker-mask) which constituted Bimal Gurung's reputation at the time of his taking over of power. They also suggest that it was mainly his image as Ghisingh's right-hand man – who held the actual muscle-power – which underlined considerations of the town-population to support him in order to stay safe. Doubts about his poor educational background were addressed through the involvement of prominent intellectuals in the initial phases of the new movement. These factors clearly distinguished him from the other opposition leaders. Although Madan Tamang (AIGL) was respected as a bright, intellectual, and wealthy person people claimed that he failed to establish links to the grassroots and instead appeared as arrogant and distanced. Although regarded as honest and educated, he not only lacked the strongman and social worker reputation amongst the masses but also Gurung's inherited GNLF-networks over the district. R.B. Rai (CPRM) still suffers from the stigma of having been a member of the CPI-M during the '86 Gorkhaland agitation. Although some people acknowledged his intellectual background and long-time political experience and decency, they could not forget the bad memories of the perceived misdeeds of the "red flag". I return to the importance of the above mentioned networks in maintaining Gurung's authority in Chapter 6, and now continue to focus on Gurung's reputation management.

5.4.2 Reputation management 2007 and after

Following the argument that Gurung's reputation as strongman and social worker was an important impetus for gaining power, living up to this reputation becomes one important strategy for the leader to stay in power. So how did Bimal Gurung himself cater to such images and the related public expectations?

To research Bimal Gurung's reputation management in and after 2007, I draw on his political speeches, an interview from the Darjeeling Times (2008), my own interview conducted with him in July 2012, as well as on his representation in the media, mainly the local newspaper *Himalaya Darpan* and on *Facebook*. The speeches analysed were held at:

- the GJM foundation meeting at Darjeeling Chowk Bazaar on October 7, 2007, attended by 20,000 people (cited as: Gurung 2007)[134];
- the public meeting at Siliguri on May 7, 2008, attended by more than 100,000 people (*TT*, 8.5.2008) (cited as: Gurung 2008);

[134] I am indebted to Towns Middleton for providing me his audio-record of this speech as the GJM refused to share their material despite repeated requests. I am also grateful to a friend, who wishes to be anonymous here for sharing the video-material of other speeches between 2008 and 2010.

- the public meeting at North Point College (near Darjeeling town) on May 30, 2010, briefly after the murder of AIGL-leader Madan Tamang had sparked public outrage against the GJM in Darjeeling town; the meeting was attended by a crowd of several hundred (cited as: Gurung 2010);
- the public meeting to celebrate the GTA-agreement at Darjeeling Chowrasta on July 21, 2011, attended by several hundred (cited as: Gurung 2011); and
- the protest meeting against the areal recommendations of the Sen Committee at Darjeeling Gymkhana on June 14, 2012, attended by several hundred party-activists (cited as: Gurung 2012).

The analysis shows, how Gurung drew on the masks of messiah, strongman/muscle-man, and social worker in response to particular situations.

The messiah

Particularly in the earlier phases of the agitation, Bimal Gurung invested into a reputation as a messiah, created through a self-portrayal of a heroic victor over Subash Ghisingh and the GNLF and as a brave opponent of the West Bengal government who sacrifices himself for the benefit of his community. This becomes particularly visible in two political speeches: the one, which he delivered on the GJM foundation day on October 7, 2007 and the other at Gandhi Maidan in Siliguri in May 2008. Both meetings were attended by several thousands of people.

To convey an image of a trustworthy and genuine leader, in his maiden speech held at Darjeeling's political centre, the Chowk Bazaar/motor stand, Gurung positioned himself under Mahakal Baba, Darjeeling's local incarnation of God Shiva, who also symbolises masculine power. "I stand here in front of the God, Mahakal Baba, for all the children of the hills (*pahaḍ*)" (Gurung 2007). He then proclaimed his oath to the God not to betray the cause of the "*jāti"* (read: Gorkhas)[135]. To underline his dedication he added: "If you want me [...] to cut my hand and feet [for Gorkhaland] then I will do so and show it to you all [applause]. [...] People must have truthfulness (*shātyātā*). And only then Gorkhaland will become reality." Claiming to be inspired by the God, Gurung then introduced the new flag of the GJM not as a party flag but as the flag of the *jāti,* thereby not only denying political aspirations but also fixing the ethno-regional demand on himself and the new outfit. Such claims were equally supported by the set-up of the meeting-venues, where the slogan "We want Gorkhaland" was printed on the three-coloured banners of the GJM, and by the Nepali-*topi* which Gurung used to wear during these initial meetings, designating him as an ethnic Gorkha.

[135] The reference to (Hindu) religion becomes clear in the GJM's organisation of big *pujas* (see Chapter 6), or Gurung's occasional pilgrimages to religious sites such as Varanasi.

But Gurung did not stop at only fixing the Gorkhaland-issue on himself. Large parts of his initial speeches were designed to invest himself with the image of a genuine and trustworthy leader. Hitting at Ghisingh and other GNLF leaders served him to attain this reputation. His maiden speech culminates in a roundabout critique of their style of leadership and functioning. Gurung brandished the GNLF councillors as self-centred *chamchās*[136] lacking any (masculine) guts and agency to criticise Ghisingh and to fight for the sake of socio-economically deprived people. He denounced Ghisingh as Yamaraj, the God of death, who killed all those raising their voice for Gorkhaland. He criticised him heavily for not living up to his developmental promises and instead leaving people in a state of deprivation while selfishly "eating" money, including even the compensation for those martyrs, who died in the '86-agitation. He also drew an image of Ghisingh as a mad leader, who deceived people and ruled through secrecy without taking others' opinions into consideration, while "selling the soil" to the West Bengal government for ulterior motives and leaving the Gorkhaland issue behind. Through his interference in religious matters (see Chapter 3) he had chased the gods from the hills away, Gurung claimed.

In contradistinction to Ghisingh, Gurung describes himself as a genuine and generous leader who cares for poor people by distributing his personal wealth amongst them. Particularly in his Siliguri speech, which addresses an instance of violence against Gorkhaland activists in Siliguri, he presents himself as a seeker of justice and protector of the community from the West Bengal government. Unlike others he did not involve in *kuṭnitī* (here: 'bad' politics; intrigues and secrecy)[137] and brought the cause of Gorkhaland forward in a straight manner:

> When Bimal Gurung does politics then it is for his mother [read: Darjeeling hills], it is for his soil! [...] They [GNLF leaders] say 'We want Gorkhaland'. And the other day they get votes and that's it for them! That practice has been ended! I have sworn on the Gita, Bible, Chandi [one form of Godess Durga], the politics of the chair [read: power] must not arise [...]. Because people should not be betrayed. They should be led according to (moral) principles (*nitī*)! (Gurung 2008)

Later he reinstated that the provision of an "identity for the [...] deprived Gorkhalis around the world" was his "moral responsibility" and not expression of "any ulterior motive" (interview in Darjeeling Times, 23.8.2008). Claims such as "I never go back on my words" intend to underline his moral dedication and trustworthiness (ibid.).

[136] Literally: spoons. It is a derogatory term used for "yes-men", sycophants, creepers, and bootlickers.
[137] This term is associated with the writings of famous Indian political philosopher Kautiliya (3rd century BC) and often translated as "diplomacy". In Sanskrit one possible meaning of the prefix *kuṭ* is "illusion, fraud, trick, untruth, and falsehood". Together with *nīti* (conduct) the Sanskrit word can thus be translated as "untruthfulness", which comes close to *kuṭnitī*'s negative association in Darjeeling (personal communication, Dagmar Wujastyk).

As described in Chapter 1, Gurung expressed this proclaimed change in political style by announcing a "new dawn" in Darjeeling, symbolised by the sun on the GJM-flag (Gurung 2007). In doing so, he again claimed inspiration from Mahakal Baba. Part of this "new dawn" was the announcement of an end of the practice of buying political support with money and a redefinition of the relations between leaders and followers, all expressed in the idiom of *sachet jantā* (see Chapter 1). Another element of this new culture is the announcement of a peaceful and Gandhian movement in contrast to the violent agitation of '86. Since 2007, prior to every meeting Gurung and other central leaders performed a *puja* in front of Gandhi's image. Such performances and announcements intend to raise hopes amongst the people for a different political regime, embodied by Gurung as the new-style leader and saviour of socially shared norms. Gurung not only announced a revival of Gorkhaland but also directly catered to people's hopes for a political regime change, where honesty and commitment dominate over corruption and violence. All this fits into the mask of the messiah. Gurung reinstates himself as a capable and genuine leader, who will not only bring about a political change in Darjeeling but also make Gorkhaland a reality. This was particularly important in the early stages of the power-shift and the revived agitation as Gurung had to make people believe that he was a better option compared to Ghisingh and the other hill-leaders.

Once this reputation was created, Gurung capitalised on it also in later stages of his rule, particularly in times of crisis. This becomes particularly evident in his speech held at North Point College on May 30, 2010 briefly after the murder of AIGL leader Madan Tamang had sparked a unique outbreak of public anger against the GJM in Darjeeling town (see Chapter 8). Gurung – who had been in Kalimpong – could only return to Darjeeling under police protection. This critical situation was exacerbated by the fact that Gurung's announced deadline of March 10, 2010 by which he wanted to achieve Gorkhaland or "otherwise commit suicide" passed without much progress on the statehood question. Instead, the GJM had begun to involve in tripartite negotiations on an "interim authority" since March 2010. All this put Gurung's legitimacy as leader for Gorkhaland at stake. To confront the decline in his authority the whole public meeting at North Point College was framed in a way to reinstate Gurung's image as the genuine leader for Gorkhaland. Also Darjeeling's prominent Member of Parliament Jaswant Singh (BJP)[138] attended the meeting as a special guest. Prior to Gurung's speech thousands of flag-swinging people danced to the tune of a song "our shared aim is Gorkhaland", while the leader, himself dressed in a red *daura shuruval* and wearing a Nepali *topi* waved a big GJM flag over his followers. Flanked by two female GLP volunteers, he again proclaimed

[138] GJM's support to Singh and his election as Darjeeling's MP for the national *Lok Sabha* in 2009 had been pushed by hopes for getting a prominent voice for Gorkhaland in Delhi. Singh had previously served as Minister for External Affairs under the 1998-2002 BJP national government, and as Finance Minister till 2004. He, however, failed to live up to the GJM's expectations. From August 2009 to June 2010 he had been expelled from the BJP due to a controversy surrounding his book on the Indian partition.

himself as the genuine bringer of Gorkhaland and announced an end to the ongoing talks about an interim council. He reiterated his earlier oath on the Gita not to betray the demand:

> So far we never betrayed our aim. Like milk is white, the GJM has the same whiteness, and it has worked accordingly! [...] They [government] tried to buy us often but we were not sold [...]. We are working for our children [...]. The GJM is carrying the issue of Gorkhaland! Bimal Gurung himself is nothing, Bimal Gurung has an aim fixed on him. (Gurung 2011)

Gurung used a martial rhetoric to underline his trustworthiness, e.g. regarding the areal question of the Dooars:

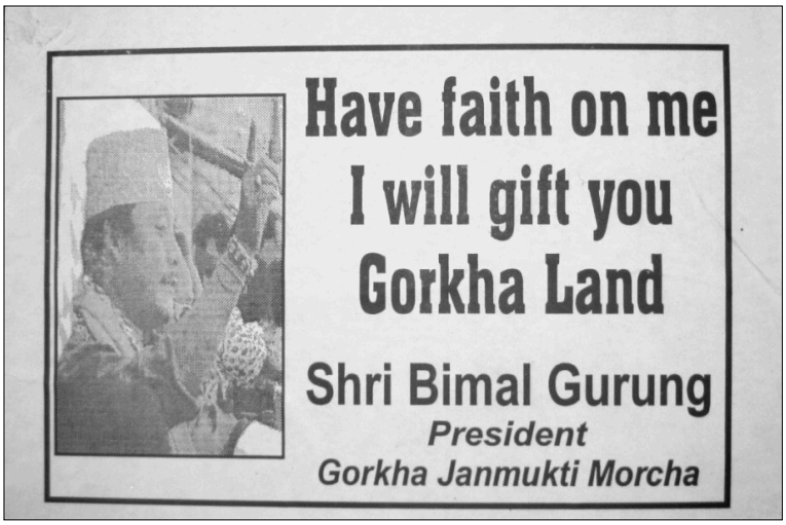
> I have said, if I will leave an inch of Dooars, you can cut my body into pieces. Yes, because the people believe in leadership. People believe that chairman Bimal Gurung will not leave us, he will not leave the Dooars and Siliguri. I must not betray their belief.[139] (ibid.)

Even after the GTA agreement in July 2011, Gurung reinstated that he would not give up the demand for Gorkhaland. He equally wore his messiah mask when condemning the recommendations of the Sen Committee whose report had smashed the GJM's hopes to include vast areas of the Dooars under the GTA authority (see Chapter 1). His announcement of the "final fight" for Gorkhaland (Gurung 2012) suggested his utilisation of the demand as a means of pressure towards the State government.

At the same time, Gurung increasingly went down on rival parties by accusing their leaders of ulterior motives when they demanded Gorkhaland and for being against Gorkhaland. His anger was particularly directed at the members of the Gorkhaland Task Force (an alliance including the AIGL, CPRM, BGP and others, see Chapter 1). He even accused them of having links to Maoist groups and of establishing militant "underground training camps" in the forests around Kalimpong (*TT*, 7.2.2012, *TT*, 8.2.2012). He also regularly defamed the CPRM by blaming their leaders for the atrocities during the agitation of '86 (Gurung 2010; interview, 7.7.2012). To counter threats from rival groups and their critique at Gurung's genuineness and ability (see Chapter 8), Gurung's construction of rivals as non-genuine leaders becomes an attempt to retain the monopoly on the Gorkhaland issue as a means for his legitimation.

Thus, although Gurung failed in keeping his promise to provide Gorkhaland by March 2010, and instead agreed on the creation of the GTA (where he subsequently became the chief), he still wears

[139] Here, Gurung directly refers to the interim set-up negotiations, where the question of areal demarcation was one of the major points of contention between the West Bengal government and the GJM. In the same speech Gurung introduces the demand of a "Gorkha Adivasi Pradesh" including Darjeeling and the contested Dooars areas to be the new State instead of Gorkhaland. This idea, which should be seen as a strategic device to bring the adivasis in the GJM's fold, was dismissed soon after it apparently failed to convince the agitators (see Chapter 4).



Picture 6: One of various yellow stickers decorating the GJM's main party office in Singmari/Darjeeling**.**

his messiah-mask and thereby tries to keep his reputation as genuine deliverer of Gorkhaland alive. Significantly, not he but GJM General Secretary Roshan Giri had undersigned the agreement in the name of the party, a fact which Gurung recurrently stressed in his speeches. When I visited the GJM party-office in July 2012, yellow stickers with the face of the leader proclaimed "Have faith on me, I will gift you Gorkhaland" (see Picture 6). Importantly, after the central government's announcement to give in to the long-standing demand for a Telangana State in the end of July 2013, the *Morcha* initiated a month-long general strike in Darjeeling hills and switched back to its radical movement mode. During this time, Gurung again heavily drew on his messiah-mask. He underlined his commitment to Gorkhaland by resigning from his post as GTA chief for a few months (till December 2013).

Gurung as strong and capable leader

Closely related to, and interwoven with his mask of the messiah, is Gurung's mask of a strongman. He invests into a reputation as strong, brave and capable leader with the power to protect his followers and to challenge the State and Union governments. In his maiden speech (2007) Gurung described himself as a "man who does not wear bangles" in contrast to the "eunuchs" of the GNLF, who did not have the guts to challenge or openly criticise Ghisingh, while he was the only one to do so even under threat of his life (Gurung 2007; 2008). This claim to such "masculine" power is underlined by his reference to Mahakal Baba, a male incarnation of God Shiva.

In his maiden speech he also promised protection to those, who faced trouble when defecting from the GNLF. Such proclamations did not only attempt at re-ensuring people, who feared repression

while joining the new outfit, but also served as a reminder that the actual power in Darjeeling was with Gurung. Gurung used his strong-man mask to challenge Ghisingh and the West Bengal government by underlining his authority over the majority of Darjeeling's population. In Siliguri for instance Gurung did not stop short of comparing himself with big leaders like Nehru, Indira Gandhi, or the Dalai Lama, who had previously held meetings at the same venue. Threats to bring the hills to a stand-still if the West Bengal government did not meet people's claims for justice and Gorkhaland are part of his mask as strong protector of people and the seeker of justice. He supported such threats with a loud and aggressive voice. Such shouting emerges as sudden eruptions from his otherwise rather calm speech. Coupled with the messiah-mask, Gurung compares himself with a "bulldozer", who will clear the road to Gorkhaland or a "growing fire which nobody can douse, not even Subash Ghisingh" (Gurung 2008). Certainly, Gurung's success in ousting Ghisingh and to stop the 6th Schedule bill catered to his reputation as strong and capable leader, who accomplished to do what other opposition forces had not been able to do in several years of resistance.

In the early stages of the GJM this strongman mask particularly served to support his messiah-claim as victor over Ghisingh and bringer of Gorkhaland. This helped him to win the trust of the population and to diminish their fear of retaliation by the GNLF by positioning himself as a protector. People, who had been waiting for years for a political change now saw in Gurung the strong and long-awaited messiah to rescue them from the GNLF's reign and bring about political change in the hills.

Later speeches, however, suggest that Gurung utilised his strongman reputation increasingly to threaten rivals and defectors. This becomes particularly clear in his speech at North Point College in May 2010. In protest against Madan Tamang's murder people in Darjeeling town had torn GJM posters and flags. Here, besides reiterating his genuineness (see above), Gurung directly threatened those who dared to challenge his authority. While denying any responsibility for Tamang's murder by reiterating the GJM's "non-violent" approach, Gurung pointed at the power of majority in direct conjunction with the Gorkhaland claim:

> Those who tore down the flags, the posters, flex - they should see the crowd today! [...] You should remember that it is harmful to touch the fire. You will burn your hand. [...] The GJM is the fire of Gorkhaland. [...] It does not cool down easily. It becomes hotter until the aim is achieved. Therefore, do not touch it as your hands will be burnt! (Gurung 2010)

Such rhetoric equates critiques of the GJM with critiques of Gorkhaland. While stressing his authority, he then proclaimed: "I excuse you. Because I am not Bimal Gurung of 1986 but of 2007" (ibid.), acting as a king who holds court while presenting himself as a forgiving and peace-loving leader. Gurung also attempted to ridicule perceived attempts of challenging his power by underlining his personal reach over the district and its people: "I have reached every home and every place [...]. I

have made them [people] 'conscious' [Engl]. Therefore, such *lākhs* [100,000s] of people came upon my request. Such crowds never had happened before" (ibid.). In contrast he ridicules the AIGL for not having any mass-support.

Gurung as social worker and accessible leader

A third mask Gurung wears is the one of a social worker, a patron of the poor and an accessible leader. Already in his maiden speech in 2007, he distinguished himself from other "selfish" GNLF leaders by proclaiming his generosity, i.e. by sharing his wealth with needy persons (Gurung 2007). While initially the messiah and strongman mask prevailed in Gurung's public presentations, this social worker mask gained prominence in the later phases of the agitation, particularly after the GTA-agreement, which shifted the focus from statehood to development of the region. In the public meeting to celebrate the GTA agreement, Gurung – this time not wearing any traditional ethnic attire – had to convince people that the council was a good solution for the time being. Unimpressed by the oppositions' critique, Gurung described himself as a dedicated patron of Darjeeling's people. Designating himself as "father of all Indian Gorkhas" he promised to work for his "children". He said that the common people (*sādhāraṇ mānchhe*) and not leaders should benefit from the council:

> And this big gift is not only for Bimal Gurung und Roshan Giri [GJM General Secretary] to eat, it should be for all people to eat (*chhapāunu*). [...] We are only one medium. We are only there to provide, to speak, and to feed. But you are here to use it. (Gurung 2011)

Also in his later protest speech against the Sen Committee's areal recommendations in July 2012 he drew upon his social worker image. Already before Gurung entered the stage various representatives of GJM's frontal organisations lauded him as an able deliverer of development, who had reached each and every place in Darjeeling to involve in ground-level work. Gurung then described himself as a generous social worker, who provided support to the needy even in rivals' areas out of humanity and not due to any political intentions.

Responding to the CPRM's critique, which questioned his right to distribute development (as he was not elected then), Gurung underlined his capability to provide: "Bimal Gurung does not need permission, he orders! Remember this! [...]. We order on behalf of our party" (Gurung 2012). He then defamed the CPRM, whose allegedly wealthy leaders were oppressing people in their strongholds by not providing development and punishing rivals through social boycott. Also in the interview I conducted with Gurung in July 2012, he reiterated that "a good leader should work for the benefit of people", and presented himself as a medium who "recommends" projects to the respective developmental institutions while denying any "authority to issue cheques or work orders" (Gurung 2012; interview, 7.7.2012). He strongly refused any allegations of corruption or receiving money from

the tea plantation proprietors but stressed that he was working for the benefit of plantation workers, e.g. by raising their wages in 2011[140]. To support his dedication Gurung regularly involved in welfare-campaigns in the district including prolonged stays at chosen places. There, he would announce the construction of infrastructure (such as roads, community halls), distribute money or construction materials to individuals, and organises health camps and football tournaments. In May 2012, for instance, he spent nearly two weeks at Rangmook/Cedars tea estate, which is regarded as a stronghold of the CPRM. This campaign was widely covered in the local newspapers and sparked outrage amongst CPRM workers who defamed him for his politically intended attack on their place (see Chapter 8).

A second element of Gurung's social worker mask is that of the accessible leader, who does not stand above people but is one of them. He regularly described himself as a "son of poor people" (interview in: Sharma 2012). Also the following passage from a speech suggests this:

> I don't think you should worship me. I converse with you people everywhere in streets and lanes. [...] Wherever you want me, I come there and work for you. I stay in your heart. I bring all your work forward. Because, today a leader is not like a god. (Gurung 2012)

Most of his followers call Gurung *"dājū"* (elder brother in Nepali), outlining a certain degree of intimacy between themselves and the leader. On the other hand they usually greet him by bowing down in front of him to receive his blessing, pointing at the clear hierarchy and submission under their leader. Also Gurung's proclaimed roles as the "father" and patron of the Gorkhas and his sometimes extravagant dresses set him apart from others. Although Gurung often wears traditional Nepali attire at public functions, the fabric of his dress is special, usually expensive and more colourful than the typical one. Such performances underline his individuality and agency and set him apart from the crowd of which he claims to be a member (cf. Mines and Gourishankar 1990).

Different situations, different masks

In sum, the discussion of Gurung's masks supports the contention that leaders have different registers at their disposal, which they choose according to the needs of certain situations (Price and Ruud 2010b; Bailey 1988). Also Gurung stressed different traits of his personality as a leader according to differing situations. While in initial stages of the movement the messiah coupled with the strongman mask prevailed, later he emphasised his reputation as a capable social worker. This suggests that he attempted to prop-up his legitimacy derived from monopolising the statehood

[140] Together with other unions, the GJM had successfully agitated for a wage-hike from 56 INR to 90 INR in 2011. Significantly, however, at the July 2012-GJM meeting tea union president had underlined that the plantation workers should stop demanding "small things" and instead focus on the Gorkhaland struggle (see Chapter 4).

demand with factual measures, embodied in the mask of the social worker and caring patron. The combination of the masks renders him a patron and protector of the poor and the Gorkhaland lovers. Gurung becomes a social worker and messiah with "bossish" appeal. Throughout, Gurung presents himself as a leader guided by moral considerations and denies oppositions' allegations of his "ulterior" motives. It is the combination of these three masks, which sets Gurung apart from other political leaders who solely draw on the Gorkhaland issue but apparently fail to present themselves as strong and/or generous persons.

5.4.3 Losing legitimacy? Changing perceptions after 2007

After having explored the differing masks Gurung wears as part of the "supply-side" of legitimacy (see Chapter 1) I now turn to the question of how these masks were perceived by those from whom Gurung wanted to win support. What people expect a "good" leader to be like and whether Gurung manages to live up to such expectations. How far Gurung's attempts to present himself as a messiah, a strong and capable leader, and a social worker reflected in the ways people perceived him. Was Gurung's reputation management successful?

The following accounts on Bimal Gurung are based mostly on responses from tea plantation residents from the three tea estates, where I stayed in 2012 and 2013. These also include statements of activists, followers, and rivals. Their accounts must be understood as situated in the specific socio-economic and cultural context of the tea plantation, characterised by strict hierarchies, dependencies, and a common feeling of inferiority and powerlessness (see Chapter 1). Before displaying both positive and negative opinions about Bimal Gurung, I first present what most respondents conceived as an "ideal" leader. Such images, which form part of the "demand" side of legitimacy (see Chapter 1) explicitly capture the perspectives of the "ruled".

The "ideal" leader

The lack of self-confidence apparent in many accounts of tea plantation workers clearly influences their positioning towards upper-level political leaders, whom especially female workers conceived as being unreachably high "up" (*māthi*). In this context, accounts displaying imaginations of an "ideal" leader suggest that he should bridge this gap and attend to the needs and sorrows of the grassroots. He should be selfless, generous, and honest. Such moral idioms serve as a reference frame for leaders' evaluation and equally frame people's expectations towards them. These include the hope for leaders' support in getting employment or attaining higher positions at the tea plantation, in getting jobs as teachers mediated through the party, or in taking care of financial problems, mainly for medical expenses.

But besides such factual expectations projected on leaders in general, respondents also expected them to be honest about the statehood demand. Such moral expectations were contrasted with critique at selfishness expressed in the idioms of "eating" (*khānū*) (mainly regarding corruption) and "selling the demand" (*bechnū*). Such idioms express the fear that "bad" leaders would strive for "selfish" gains by misusing the statehood agenda and people's trust. The vernacular term *ghoṭālā* (scam, cozenage) summarises such perceptions of leaders who selfishly "steal" money which was intended for the public, mostly from state developmental contracts[141]. There are, however, differences in the emphasis on the traits of an "ideal" leader. While many supporters also expressed hopes to benefit economically from a leaders' distribution of wealth, rival CPRM activists rated a leaders' honesty to accomplish Gorkhaland higher, a point I discuss later (see also Chapter 8).

Bimal Gurung as a good leader

Indeed, some GJM activists and followers attributed the outlined features of an "ideal" leader to Bimal Gurung. Those who described him as generous pointed at his distribution of money and other things to the needy. In their opinion, he did not keep the money he (presumably) got from contractors with himself but instead used it for helping others at the "grassroots". In contrast, most respondents were aware that leaders of other parties lacked such financial resources and one could not expect them to help in times of crisis. Others attributed the reopening of their tea estates or the wage hike in 2011 to Bimal Gurung and the GJM. For some, Gurung's welfare campaigns proved his dedication to help the poor. Even though some thought of such campaigns as not morally but rather politically motivated ("to garner votes"), the leader's motivation did not seem to matter as long as they benefitted somehow. Also GJM activists praised Gurung for a comparatively equal distribution of contracts amongst them (in contrast to the GNLF time) and claimed there was less corruption (*ghoṭālā*) compared to earlier.

A second element of Gurung's reputation is the conviction amongst followers that he would bring Gorkhaland, despite the prolonged agitation and the compromise on the GTA. One teacher from a GJM-stronghold expressed his trust in Gurung by pointing at his oath on the Gita and the Bible. Also others perceived the GJM as fighting for the "*jāti*". Moreover, accounts of several female workers from a GJM stronghold equated the GJM and Bimal Gurung with Gorkhaland. They hardly had any information on other parties promoting the same aim. One woman even said that "Bimal Gurung is like a god for us". This clearly reflects Gurung's attempts to monopolise the statehood demand.

[141] Often this term is used in conjunction with expressions of "eating" (*khānū*). "To eat *ghoṭālā*" (*ghoṭālā khānū*) means to gain personal benefits from the contract work by skimming money through the use of minor construction materials or faking bills. *Ghoṭālā* is a term more regularly used than "corruption" (*bhrasṭachār*) in Darjeeling.

The third but less prominent element in people's positive accounts on Gurung was reference to his strength and braveness. Several respondents suggested that Bimal Gurung was the only leader strong enough to overthrow Ghisingh (see above). Some activists also praised his ability to unite people in the joined struggle for statehood.

Bimal Gurung as a bad leader

Yet, not all accounts on Gurung and the GJM were positive and opinions were sharply divided amongst the plantation workers. Although such critique was largely pointed at the local party-leaders, it also impacted Gurung's reputation as good leader. Importantly, such critique was hardly ever voiced in the open and must not be confused with resistance to Gurung (see Chapter 8), or the openly voiced critiques of rival parties' members.

Many persons in the plantation criticised the GJM and the local leaders in particular for being dishonest and for misusing people's trust for their "selfish" economic gains. Instead of looking after people's problems and the village needs by distributing what they presumably received from Bimal Gurung, they were allegedly only concerned about their own benefits. Answering the question of what the party had given to them, many people stressed that only local leaders (or "portfolio" [Engl.]-holders) had benefitted. They saw this as a sign of unequal distribution. Such selfishness is also attributed to Bimal Gurung, who in the eyes of some misused the Gorkhaland demand as a begging bowl to gain benefits from the State government. Some people even denounced Gurung as a "liar". One female worker pronounced this:

> They say they would bring Gorkhaland. They are using us people to support them. What would *netās* be without the people? But then they forget us and what they promised to us. I don't understand politics here. (interview, 14.5.2012)

One of the most popular reputations that Bimal Gurung (probably involuntarily) had amongst both rural and urban population is that of a womanizer. Rumours about his many affairs with devoted female activists of the *Nari Morcha* or the GLP added to stories about his many weddings. Some people joked by calling him "Bijan" (Nepali for seed/sperm) Gurung. Some other leaders also had such derogatory pet names[142].

A comparably open forum for critique is *Facebook,* which gained prominence with the increase of smart-phones, especially amongst the youth. Recurrent accounts in groups such as "GTA go back" depict Gurung as a thief running away with developmental funds (*Facebook,* Darjeeling Boy Riderzz,

[142] MLA Harka Bahadur Chettri is called "*Pharka*" (Nepali for return/go back) Bahadur Chettri, reflecting his return to the GJM inspite of quitting after Madan Tamang's murder and general secretary Roshan Giri is sometimes called "*Shoṣaṇ*" (Nepali for exploitation) Giri. Such jokes can be regarded as part of the "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990) whereby those subjected to rule express a kind of resistance.

20.12.2012) or as a broker of the government (ibid.). The general mood in such groups expresses disappointment and anger with Gurung and also with other political leaders. Such accounts are, however, contrasted by those lauding Gurung for his decisions and policy. This division in the *Facebook* community reflects the good and bad opinions on Bimal Gurung. While some publicly proclaim their loyalty towards the leader others openly (or using pseudonyms) oppose him.

In sum, such accounts express feelings of betrayal and perceived exploitation similar to those associated with Ghisingh before he came to fall. Despite this critique, however, a majority continues to support Gurung (at least passively). In this context, respondents' regular expressions of fear from violence and oppression if opposing the GJM suggest their perceived compulsion to follow (I explore this dimension in detail in Chapter 7).

Rivals' voices – struggles over reputation

While the two earlier sections displayed accounts of GJM activists and followers, I now turn to the opinions of outspoken GJM rivals as members of opposition parties. These strive for destroying Gurung's reputation as genuine leader and instead accuse him of being selfish, dishonest, and incapable of achieving Gorkhaland, a leader selling the demand for personal gain and ruling through violence. To underline their critique they point at Gurung's agreement on the GTA and the murder of Madan Tamang for which they hold him responsible. In contrast to Gurung, leaders such as Madan Tamang or R.B. Rai are presented as genuine and honest, sacrificing personal economic wealth or positions for Gorkhaland. Not only public speeches or contributions in local newspapers voice such critique but also posters placed at central places in the towns do so. Accounts of local CPRM activists suggest that the parameters for their evaluation differ from those who emphasise that leaders should share their wealth and deliver development. Instead, they elevated the Gorkhaland demand above developmental aspirations suggesting that an "ideal" leader should first concentrate on Gorkhaland even if this means to compromise on socio-economic agendas. Thereby they underlined their conviction of not "being bought" by any of Gurung's welfare-campaigns, which they condemned as politically motivated. Thereby they questioned Gurung's attempts to present himself as guided by "moral" considerations[143]. Besides, rivals often criticised Gurung and the GJM for their reign through "muscle power" or violence (see also Chapter 7).

A very pronounced critique, which contrasts such moral aspirations towards leaders with their perceived conduct and which drew some media attention in Darjeeling, was expressed on a public poster of an (till date) unknown outfit, the *Krantikari Mukti Sena* (Revolutionary Liberation Army,

[143] I will expand on this argumentation in Chapter 8, when discussing the limits of the GJM's domination.

KMS). Their poster reads as a manifesto for "ideal" leaders contrasted with a disappointed and angry public. It spelled out a warning towards the political leaders, yet without directly naming Gurung:

> Politics should be done in favour of the public, leaders should not only move around in good cars, and sell the aspiration of the people and the soil (*māṭo*). Leaders and individuals supporting the State and creating disturbance – be aware. Whenever the aspirations are sold, when exploitation crosses the line of endurance, when the public starts to get robbed, then the KMS will come forward. When some parties start playing theatre in the name of revolution then we will not answer with words but with bullets. No one here has the right to play with the emotions of our love towards freedom […]. Leader exploiting the people, be aware! KMS (photographed in Mirik, 5.6.2013)

Such critique not only reflects ideals of leadership by condemning "exploitation" or the "sale of aspirations", it also expresses public aspirations for honesty and dedication for a common cause. It attempts to remind leaders of the ultimate dependence of their success on the support of the public and represents the attempt of a group to define what is morally right or wrong in the conduct of political leaders. As such it can be understood as an expression of a politically aware subject, which formulates its demands towards the regional leaders and not (only) towards the state (as in the Gorkhaland rhetoric). The existence of the ominous KMS, however, remained reduced to this poster and the group never came out in the open.

The loss of legitimacy

The presented accounts underline that public evaluations of Gurung draw on both, moral and instrumental considerations; this renders the ruled "moral teams" as well as "transactional groups" (Bailey 1969, 75, 82). Two very common elements depicting people's aspirations towards the leader are the idioms of the serving patron caring for the poor on the one hand, and the trustworthy contender of the moral claim of Gorkhaland on the other. Contradictory accounts of Gurung's conduct as leader, however, display how divided Darjeeling's people are about him. While some praised him for his generosity and honesty, many who lacked direct experience with Gurung relied on their impressions of local leaders to evaluate the performance of the GJM in general. Yet, a majority of the accounts expressed doubts about Gurung's leadership qualities and suggested that the initial wave in favour of Gurung has abated towards 2012. His inability to bring the promised Gorkhaland as well as the perceived insufficient provision of goods and services resulted both in a loss of his normative and factual legitimacy (Chapter 1).

Although Gurung's differing masks of the messiah and the social worker attempt to cater to such expectations, the citied critical accounts suggest that his reputation management was not always successful. Particularly opposition parties proclaim that Gurung is not "really" the leader he pretends

to be. Such struggle over a leaders' reputation becomes one main part in the struggle over political legitimacy. In Chapter 8 I will further explore the practical implications of such critique for the political authority of Gurung and the GJM.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the events, which led to Subash Ghisingh's downfall in 2007/2008 and to the rise of a new dominant leader, Bimal Gurung and the Gorkha Liberation Front (GJM) as voice at the forefront of a revived statehood agitation. I showed how in 2007 people's hopes for a new political regime and liberation were translated into support for the GJM, and how Bimal Gurung, the president of the GJM, responded to such aspirations by portraying himself as a capable, strong, and generous leader of the Gorkhas. Drawing on the useful concepts of reputation, reputation management, and masks (Bailey 1971; Price and Ruud 2010b), I argued that Gurung's reputation as muscle-man and generous leader (in combination with his already existing economic resources and networks) is a major factor in his rise to power in Darjeeling. This reputation distinguished him from other leaders such as Madan Tamang or R.B. Rai.

Gurung wears a mask of a messiah, and was thereby able to embody not only Gorkhaland but also public aspirations for a new political regime during times of a perceived political crisis. A disenfranchised mass was waiting for an able challenger of Ghisingh, who had not only failed in providing development but seemingly also sold Gorkhaland to settle for the 6th Schedule, an agreement, which rivals said was a "risk" to the Gorkhas' unity. Capitalising on the success of Prashant Tamang in the *Indian Idol* reality show, Gurung not only drew on the ethno-regional agenda but also proclaimed a change in political style and leadership in Darjeeling by going down heavily on the GNLF leaders for being "selfish" and "selling the soil". His success in ousting Ghisingh and stopping the 6th Schedule supported Gurung's image as a charismatic hero rescuing the subdued hills from an oppressive "king". Gurung's attempts to monopolise the statehood agenda were supported by his defamations of rival leaders whom he denied the right to represent the cause based on allegations of dishonesty and selfishness.

To underline and maintain his reputation, Gurung wore different masks: the messiah-mask, the strongman mask, and the social worker mask. These masks reflect not only the concrete situations and political developments but also display shifting emphasis on certain traits by which he attempted to maintain his public support base. Through these masks Gurung attracted those who projected their hopes for a long-awaited and capable messiah on him and joined the GJM to struggle for a

common cause. Drawing on Gorkhaland equipped the GJM with a strong programmatic appeal and provided Gurung with a strong normative base for legitimising his authority. Simultaneously, via his social worker mask he also catered to those, who had previously been excluded from the GNLF patronage and were hoping for a new chance to gain material benefits through their engagement with the party.

Yet, as Bailey found, although drawing on a normative cause helps a leader to gain power it can also become risky if the cause is not achieved or people perceive the leader to compromise on it (Bailey 1988, 57). Subsequently, also Gurung was increasingly criticised for not living up to the high expectations people initially invested into him. The GJM's engagement in negotiations on an "interim council" from 2010 on and its eventual agreement on the GTA in 2011 was perceived by many as a compromise on the statehood agenda and entailed a loss of Gurung's normative legitimacy. Further, accounts of plantation workers underline that many of them – albeit supporting the statehood demand – also sought improvements of their socio-economic conditions, which forced Gurung to prop-up his authority with factual measures (cf. Karateke 2005). His emphasis on the social worker mask is a response to such expectations.

Critical accounts, however, suggest that Gurung's attempts to "deliver" to gain legitimacy as a social worker were not always successful. Instead of living up to proclamations of a "new dawn" in politics, people's hopes for a different (i.e. less violent and corrupt) political regime in Darjeeling were shattered by the conduct of Gurung and other GJM leaders. These were increasingly perceived as compromising and betraying on the statehood agenda. Further, instead of becoming an inclusive social movement, the revived Gorkhaland movement again declined to a single-party dominated agitation. Incidences of violence against rivals also raised doubts about whether the new party would actually be able to bring about a substantial political change in Darjeeling or whether the announcement of a "democratic and non-violent" movement was simply a rhetoric device. But despite contradicting people's aspirations expressed in the idiom of Gorkhaland (see Chapter 4), the GJM continued to win elections (e.g. in 2011, and 2014), and is still recognised as the only negotiation partner by both the West Bengal and the central governments.

In the following two chapters, I show how the GJM compensated its loss of normative and factual legitimacy through the use of repression. This shifts the focus from the leader Gurung to the party-organisation.

6 Silencing dissent I. Resource monopolies, “money”, and “muscle power”

The previous chapter showed how Bimal Gurung and the GJM came into power. It identified both, Gurung’s available resources in form of money and networks, and his reputation as a social worker and a genuine, strong leader as factors explaining why it was him and not another leader gaining majority support. Drawing on the ethno-regional Gorkhaland agenda invested Gurung with normative legitimacy while his “social worker” mask suggested his willingness to deliver material benefits to loyal followers. Against the backdrop of such public expectations and the gradual decline of Gurung’s perceived ability to live up to these, this and the following chapter explore two more strategies through which the GJM as a political party maintained its power. This chapter explores the establishment of resource monopolies over developmental institutions. These function as an important means in maintaining the party’s “mobilising function” and reflect its obligation to “deliver” material benefits to its supporters (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010, 139). Chapter 7 then explores the functions and effects of hard repression against party rivals. I will show that both strategies ultimately shrank the spaces for open critique of the GJM, the possibilities for a more inclusive statehood movement and thereby contributed to the GJM’s monopolisation of the statehood movement. Together, resource monopolies and hard repression become important aspects to explain the persistence of Darjeeling’s competitive authoritarian regime.

6.1 Trouble at the “peace *puja*”

Since 1980, the date April 5 has been a special day in Darjeeling hills. It marks the foundation of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). As in every year, also in 2012 the remaining activists of the GNLF had planned to celebrate its anniversary at various places in Darjeeling. One of them was the small market town Bagargaun* in the plains close to Siliguri. Here, the administration had granted the GNLF permission to hold their meeting in close vicinity to the local police post. Much to the annoyance of the GNLF, also the GJM was seeking permission to hold a meeting of its youth wing here on April 5. But fearing clashes between the archenemies GNLF and GJM, the administration denied permission. So instead the GJM decided to set up a “world peace *puja*” (form of religious

worship), scheduled from April 3-7, to be held on a field next to the police post. Who would not allow a prayer for world-peace?[144]

When I reached the site one day before the GNLF foundation day, the atmosphere in the usually quiet and peaceful market place was tense. Two water cannon-trucks were parked in vicinity of the GJM venue. Sushma*, the local GNLF leader nervously told me that she had not been able to eat for days. I could sense how tense she was. But despite frequent requests by the local GJM leaders (some of her relatives) to cancel the party programme, she refused. "I wished all Gorkhas would fight united for Gorkhaland instead of fighting each other. I feel the GJM activists are only after the money," she alleged. Nirman*, the local GJM leader also seemed tense. He expressed his fear from violent clashes between the two parties: "Tomorrow, we have to live in the same village. How shall that work if there is violence?" On my question why he was still an active member of the GJM despite his apprehensions, he hesitantly admitted that he was hoping for some kind of "recovery" through the party as he once had taken a loan to meet the expenses of organising a public GJM meeting. "I am not free", he admitted. Sachin*, another activist in his twenties, expressed his hope that by supporting the GJM programme his prospects of being given a contract through the sub-divisional committee would increase although he did not like the idea of disturbing the GNLF. Initially he had strongly believed in the GJM's ability to achieve Gorkhaland and even participated in the *pada yatra* to the Assamese border (see Chapter 4). This was four years ago. Now Sachin sadly concluded: "Gorkhaland is not a movement for money - but the leaders make it a movement for money."

On the morning of April 5, holy Hindu chants sounded over the "peace *puja*"-venue. A priest and hundreds of participants were performing *puja* at a small make-shift *mandir* (temple) below the large tent, which decorated the place. Although the venue gave no indication of the GJM – underlining its seemingly "non-political" intension - the small bazaar was decorated with new GJM flags, and many of the jeeps with *puja* attendants carried small party flags. But the peaceful atmosphere was to be mistaken. When I walked to the bazaar, suddenly a pick-up with about 10 GNLF activists holding up the green party flag approached the police station close to the peace *puja* venue. Before it could reach, however, it was stopped by a mob of men, who seemingly appeared out of nowhere. They surrounded the truck, and started to hit and shake it while shouting, and tried to get the driver out. Being outnumbered, and faced with this sudden blockade the driver took the back gear and speeded back the road before fleeing the place. Despite the heavy police presence (and the nearby police

[144] In fact the GJM regularly organises such large-scale *pujas,* often sponsored by regional business people and attended by party followers and activists. They are attended by high-profile GJM leaders (including Bimal Gurung) and can be seen as part of the GJM's strategy to remind people of leaders' dedication to (Hindu) religion. Besides being a site to offer religious worship, such *pujas* also provide an occasion for supporters to travel and socialise.

station), only when the mob of angry men attempted to intrude a house, where they believed the owner of the GNLF truck was hiding, the police interfered. Also a female GJM-leader engaged in negotiations between activists and the police. Anticipating more trouble, some shop-keepers had already closed their shutters. Meanwhile, the GJM-organised peace-*puja* continued, with speakers blasting peaceful chants over the tensed atmosphere. Although the *puja* was scheduled till April 7, already in the morning of the April 6 activists broke down the tents. After the *puja* was finished, indeed peace returned to Bagargaun. The GNLF had successfully been silenced.

Events like this raise questions on the bases of the GJM's public support. The cited accounts of GJM activists at the peace *puja* suggest that their participation was motivated by hopes for rewards in form of contracts and money more than by their emotional attachment to the GJM and the Gorkhaland demand (or "world peace"). They participated in the event even though they did not approve of violence against the GNLF. Also activists at other sites often expressed their hopes for gaining access to government jobs (e.g. as teachers) or contracts through the GJM. Had the statehood movement indeed become a "movement for money", as Sachin claimed?

Chapter 5 demonstrated that Bimal Gurung's initial reputation as a capable and honest leader, strong enough to deliver Gorkhaland, received first cracks after the party engaged with the government in negotiations on an interim council. Further, inspite of his mask of a "social worker", the public increasingly began to perceive him and other GJM leaders as selfish persons, who "sold" Gorkhaland for their personal wealth. This resulted in losses of normative and factual legitimacy. Yet, the GJM supported candidates won both the national *Lok Sabha* elections in 2009 and 2014 and the West Bengal Assembly polls in 2011, by huge margins (Table 1 in Chapter 1). As discussed in Chapter 1, research on authoritarian regimes holds that such losses in normative legitimacy have to be compensated by other measures, including the co-optation of elites, repression, and/or the provision of social goods such as socio-economic improvements (Gerschewski et al. 2012; Karateke 2005). Drawing on this assumption, I contend that both, the decline of public trust towards the GJM's ability to achieve Gorkhaland and the increasing demands of its activists for tangible benefits made leaders rely on so-called "money" and "muscle power" to maintain their regional authority expressed in their position at the forefront of the Gorkhaland agitation and its ability to mobilise followers[145].

In this chapter I show how the GJM successfully established "resource monopolies" (Greene 2010, 808) via its State-accepted control over developmental institutions in Darjeeling. The partisan distribution of such resources through political patronage functioned as a means to maintain the party's widespread activists' networks by promising benefits to active supporters and contractors.

[145] "Money" and "muscle power" are no vernacular terms in Darjeeling and were solely used by intellectuals/journalists during interviews in their descriptions of the GJM's rule.

Such distribution is equally perceived as a means of repression, as people fear to be denied access to developmental schemes. This makes political patronage one major strategy in the construction of the GJM's political authority[146]. Further, the above incidence at Bagargaun suggests that activists' expectation of benefits through the GJM's resource monopoly is closely related to the violent repression of rivals. I argue that such hard repression is a means for party activists and leaders to underline their loyalty towards the party president Bimal Gurung. Thus, violence against rivals becomes a currency in the inner-party competition for the scarce patronage resources. Yet, ultimately, the GJM's dependence on developmental resources diminishes its authority as it gives the State government (as a provider of these resources) a tool to control regional elite construction.

To substantiate this argument, Chapter 6.2 grounds the discussion in relation to research on resource monopolies, patronage, and corruption in South Asia. Emphasis is placed on the role of party-organisations in state capture. Chapters 6.3 and 6.4 explore how the GJM filled the governmental vacuum left after Ghisingh's ousting by capturing and monopolising access to developmental state institutions such as the DGHC and the *gram panchayats*. Based on the assumption that patronage not only helps leaders to gain reputations as selfless and generous social workers but is equally a means of soft repression (Piliavsky 2014b; Way and Levitsky 2006), I explore how party-activists, followers, and rivals experience the rules of access and distribution (Chapter 6.5). This helps me to display some intricate connections between "money" and "muscle power" (or patronage and hard repression). Together, I contend in Chapter 6.6, these function as important means in a "politics of silencing" as juxtaposed to the GJM's claims to "non-violence" and "democracy". This has serious implications for the form and inclusive nature of the statehood movement. I draw on case-studies and accounts of insiders and complement these with statements of party leaders and activists, and public perceptions of the GJM's practices.

6.2 Patronage, resource monopolies, and "muscle-power"

I now introduce approaches to analyse how parties and politicians garner public support through the distribution and promise of patronage. I first briefly contextualise patronage in India historically before concentrating on clientelism or political patronage as a strategy in politics. I then introduce research, which underlines the importance of patronage in competitive authoritarian regimes, where dominant parties establish "resource monopolies" (Greene 2010, 808) to cater to the interests of

[146] There are trustworthy accounts which substantiate that besides developmental schemes, the GJM derives its "money power" from financial contributions of tea proprietors and other business-people. Due to the secret nature of such sources, these cannot be further discussed.

their clientele. This discussion complements the earlier introduction to co-optation/patronage from Chapter 1.

6.2.1 Patronage and the developmental state

Paul Brass stressed that local structures of power cannot persist without the control over government institutions (Brass 1984). Also recent studies suggest that the ability to access state resources and to deliver them to a chosen clientele is one of the major bases of political authority in South Asia (Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Hansen 2001; Chandra 2003; Véron et al. 2006). Leaders have to give their potential followers the impression that they are willing and able to "deliver" benefits to them. Their investment in a reputation as selfless and generous "social workers" (see Chapter 5) underlines their compulsion to live up to followers' expectations. Patronage, broadly defined as a reciprocal relationship between persons of different hierarchical position that includes the inter-personal exchange of valued goods and services in anticipation of a reciprocal return (Piliavsky 2014b, 5), is one important means of such political mobilisation.

Historically, structures of patronage in India have undergone significant changes. Earlier studies identified patrons as land-lords or members of higher castes, who provided protection to labourers or lower-caste clients. Patronage was mainly associated with economic status differences or caste-hierarchies (Weiner 1965; Weingrod 1968; Scott 1969; Brass 1984). After Independence such traditional structures changed: Krishna (2007) identified the expansion of the state, the spread of education, and increasing political competition as factors that entailed the emergence of patrons stemming from different caste and economic backgrounds (see also: Gupta 1998; Alm 2006, 23; Price 2007). Amongst these are the so called "*naya netas*" (new leaders), educated persons, who support others in accessing state services. They are not necessarily member of political parties or higher caste groups (Krishna 2007).

Many authors identified the emergence of a "developmental state" (Chatterjee 1998, 2; Kochanek 2010; see also Kothari 1965) as important factor to change patronage relations and public expectations towards leaders and the state. In order to meet the challenge of competitive party politics and factionalism since the 1960s and 1970s the Indian National Congress (INC) gave more power to party-leaders and state officials in channelling goods to selected clientele (Wilkinson 2006, 14). Indira Gandhi's "*garibi hatau*"(abolish poverty) campaign established the idea "that the state was the principal, and in many instances the sole, agent of bettering the condition of the people and providing relief in times of adversity" (Chatterjee 1998, 21). The emergence of this "developmental state" (Chatterjee 1998) went along with changing political aspirations expressing individuals' increasing awareness of their entitlements (such as embodied in social movements, see Chapter 1).

"New plebeian identities" (Hansen 2001, 9) emerged, extending the pressure on politicians or parties to deliver the services people began to recognise as their rights. Against this backdrop it is not surprising that the state and its developmental machinery in form of projects and welfare schemes became a major resource for aspiring leaders or incumbents to maintain and gain public support by granting access to their potential followers through patronage[147].

In this chapter, I explore how GJM leaders use patronage as a means to garner political support in forms of votes or attendance at party-programmes and agitations. Such political patronage – which I use interchangeably with clientelism – refers to a reciprocal relationship between political power-holders/seekers and their respective supporters, where the former (promise to) dispense valued benefits to the later contingent on their political support (Wilkinson 2006, 8; de Wit 1996, 51)[148]. This instrumental understanding of patronage stands at the heart of what Chandra (2003) has termed a "patronage democracy" which I detail in the following.

6.2.2 From patronage to "patronage democracy"

The model of a "patronage democracy" (Chandra 2003) evolved from the attempt to explain ethnic favouritism in Indians' voting behaviour. The model draws on the assumption that elected officials or candidates, who have the discretion to implement laws and allocate jobs and services at the disposal of the state, are striving for votes to retain their office and access to the resources. They (black-) market "promises" to provide access to scarce goods in return for votes. A second premise of the model is that voters lack concrete information of the actual distribution of the promised (and scarce) benefits. Therefore, they do not only base their voting decisions on the record of past patronage transactions but also tend to support ethnic parties because they expect their candidates to favour members of their group before others. Accordingly, officials or candidates target (ethnic) group members because the provision of benefits to one group member sends signals to others that they too could benefit in future. Thus, investing in an identity "offers [voters] the best available means by which to obtain desired benefits, and not because such identification is valuable in itself" (ibid. 11). The same could apply in Darjeeling, where people invest in a party-based identity, e.g. by placing party flags on their houses, anticipating benefits as "group members".

Chandra's model underlines the importance for leaders to "capture" the state so to continue with the distribution of patronage, which is necessary to garner votes. State capture can be described as the appropriation of governmental development programmes, welfare schemes, and governmental

[147] For a detailed study on patronage of religious leaders please refer to Mines & Gourishankar (1990).
[148] Patronage is not confined to a solely instrumental relationship. Rather, various studies underline that it is embedded in morally defined conceptions about the "proper" roles and conduct of leaders (Manor 2000; Alm 2006; Krishna 2007; Price 2007; Piliavsky 2014b) (see Chapter 5).

jobs (e.g. police, teachers) through the establishment of structures, which enable or restrict other groups or individuals to access such benefits. State capture is often discussed in the context of corruption or the "abuse of power by public officials to provide benefits to individuals or groups in return for financial benefits, public sector jobs or political support" (Kochanek 2010, 365). An extreme form of exclusive state capture is the establishment of "resource monopolies" (Greene 2010, 808), often through a dominant political party. Such resource monopolies are an important means for control in competitive authoritarian regimes.

6.2.3 Resource monopolies, punishment regimes, and decentralisation

While Chandra's model of a "patronage democracy" is concerned with explaining ethnic favouritism in voting behaviour, studies on patronage in dominant party or competitive authoritarian regimes focus on its utilisation as a means of repression and mobilisation. Magaloni et al. (2010) explore the role of political parties as patronage systems, which channel state resources to a selected clientele. They claim that in order to sustain their authority, parties in dominant party regimes need to cater to the interests of elites through co-optation ("bargaining function") and to the needs of citizens, who expect a continuing delivery of resources and goods, through the party. In this way leaders use the party machine to mobilise mass support ("mobilising function") (ibid. 139) which helps them to counter threats to their rule (see Chapter 1). Privileges are allocated based on (perceived) degrees of citizens' loyalty and withdrawn from defectors. This gives rise to a "punishment regime" (ibid. 128). In this instrumental logic, "the more [a party] monopolises valuable resources, the more capable a one-party regime is of trapping citizens into supporting the system"(ibid. 129; Magaloni 2006). This particularly affects poor voters, whose livelihoods often depend on the patronage of the party (Blaydes 2006; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). Such contentions are supported by Greene's (2010) study on the single-party regime in Mexico. Greene holds that via punishment and rewards through the party's patronage system, "resource monopolies" sustain "political monopolies" (Greene 2010, 808).

Various authors stress the importance of formal and informal institutions in channelling such patronage resources. Elections and formal party organisations for instance can serve as conflict management tools for elites and help to regularise the distribution of benefits (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Gerschewski et al. 2012). Also de Wit (1996) in his study on elite dominated political control in Madras slums underlines the importance of the party organisation in channelling patronage. He compared a party with a "political machine" – a stable, centralised and disciplined hierarchy. Party organisations can also be employed as surveillance tools to monitor citizens' loyalty and to sanction rivals (Magaloni 2006).

Also informal organisations are important in channelling patronage. This is very pronounced in neopatrimonial and presidential systems. Neopatrimonial systems are "organised around hierarchical and personalistic networks that are typically informal, non-transparent, exclusivist and generally non-institutionalised" (Rubongoya 2007; Collins 2009, 254). A president at the top of this hierarchy rules through providing patronage to informal cliques, who control their own sub-ordinate groups. These cliques expect rewards in forms of control over lucrative posts or other resources in return for their loyalty (Collins 2009, 255). Authority in such systems is personalised and rooted in these reciprocal exchange networks. If such patronage networks are controlled by a towering leader, who sanctions sub-ordinate leaders' deliveries to their respective clientele, this is called "presidentialism" (Rubongoya 2007, 7).

The dependency of such systems on a regular supply of resources, however, makes them vulnerable (Levitsky and Way 2002, 7; Burnell 2006, 553; Gerschewski et al. 2012). De Wit (1996), for instance, stressed that a party as political machine relies heavily on material incentives and rewards to win the loyalty of cadre and followers (de Wit 1996, 58). This has important implications for the relation of the political party to the state. In the model, the government administration takes the role of 'price producers' and the electorate becomes the 'price consumers' (de Wit 1996, 59). The leader (or politician), who stands at the centre of the network, acts as a broker between the two groups, representing the "patron" of the poor. But if the resource supply diminishes, the party-machine and the reputation of the leader as "patron" are endangered (ibid.).

State capture or the establishment of resource monopolies are not only sustained by electoral successes of incumbents yet. Studies on the effects of decentralisation and its relation to patronage and corruption in India point at the role of local politicians and state officials at the district and *panchayat* levels. Their positions as elected representatives or connections to politicians (Banerjee 2011) help them to act as mediators, brokers, or gatekeepers for gaining access to powerful upper bodies such as party leaders or to state sponsored welfare schemes and developmental contracts (Ruud 2000; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2003; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006; Berenschot 2011b; Perera-Mubarak 2012; Sadanandan 2012). Their ability to channel the flow of resources makes them play both an enabling and disabling role for local citizens, who often rely on their services to get things done (Corbridge, Williams, and Srivastava 2003; Véron et al. 2006; Berenschot 2011a)[149].

For instance, Veron et al.'s (2006) study on the employment guarantee scheme in villages of West Bengal underlines how elected *panchayat* councillors, State level politicians, the activists of the

[149] Besides political leaders (*netās*), also other persons can take such intermediary functions (e.g. holy men, *dadas*, criminals, educated persons) (Mines and Gourishankar 1990; Hansen 2001; Krishna 2003). Not all of them necessarily have political affiliation.

communist party (CPI-M), and contractors form institutionalised "corruption networks". They decide on the geographical distribution of the benefits as well as on the beneficiaries for their personal or political gain (ibid. 1937) and thereby function as intermediaries or brokers. Also other studies show how such actors attain the role of "gatekeepers" (Manor 2000; Simon 2009; Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Banerjee 2011; Alm 2006). The authors conclude that such state-capture creates or sustains new elites of "political entrepreneurs" (Veron et al 2006, 1924), who do not aim at political but at short-term *personal* gains through their positions in government or close to it (ibid.; see also Sadanandan 2012, 223).

Bardan and Mookherjee (2003; 2006) identify the lack of local accountability structures and of democratic functioning as the main reasons for the failure of decentralisation in poverty alleviation programmes in developing countries. Under such conditions, instead of leading to greater accountability, decentralisation entails more patronage and clientelism at the local level (Sadanandan 2012). Interestingly, more electoral competition correlates with a more equal distribution of programmes (ibid.). These latter studies are important not only because this thesis is concerned with clientelism in decentralised institutions (the DGHC and *gram panchayats*) but also because they suggest that local leaders do not necessarily cater to the political needs of their respective parties but (also) strive for personal gain by utilising their party-positions.

6.2.4 From "money" to "muscle power"

Research on the "criminalisation of politics" (Kochanek 2010; Berenschot 2011a; Vaishnav 2012) additionally underlines the functions of criminals or *goondas* in the networks described above. While Chapter 5 elaborated on the reputation-creating functions of a *goonda* or strongman image, I here point at their role in the acquirement of material resources. There are various studies, which suggest that "money" power is closely related to the involvement of strong-men, *goondas* or the so-called "muscle" power. The term "criminalisation of politics" describes "the increasing presence of persons with criminal records among elected representatives at local, state, and even national levels" (Chatterjee 2011, 21; see also: Kochanek 2010; Vaishnav 2011b; Wakode 2011).

Kochanek (2010) sees the beginning of this process in the 1960s, when Congress leaders increasingly relied on local "thugs" to secure their election (ibid. 376). Many authors explain this phenomenon by pointing at politicians' obligation to deliver and to provide access to state resources for their expecting clientele. This puts them under pressure as the non-delivery can result in the loss of votes and popular support, and gives those an advantage who are willing to "bend the law" in order to provide for their clientele (Vaishnav 2012). This favours criminals and the use of illegal activities in politics. As displayed in Chapter 5, politicians' physical strength, masculinity, and possession of

"muscle power" are symbolically equated with political strength and the ability to deliver (the mask of the "boss").

Berenschot (2011a) describes how *goondas* enter a reciprocal relationship with local politicians in Gujarat. In his case-study, *goondas* utilise their money and muscle-power to enable local politicians to be (re-)elected (e.g. through buying or intimidating voters) and in turn enjoy politicians' protection from criminal persecution. In another study, Jeffrey and Lerche (2000) demonstrate how the powerful land-holding elite, the Jats in Uttar Pradesh "colonised the state" by occupying local police positions by virtue of their connections to local politicians and ability to pay bribes and thereby managed to keep its members out of the purview of criminal punishment. These studies point at the interdependencies between "money" and "muscle" power, and the patronage nature of criminal-leader relations.

Such violence is not exclusive to enforce only the dominant party's claim on developmental resources and contracts. My data suggest that resources are also fiercely struggled over within the party. I will show that in this context the violent repression of party rivals functions as a means for activists to gain appreciation of the party-president and prove their loyalty. This, in their opinion, increases the chances for gaining access to the scarce and contested patronage resources. Such repression equally finds application in silencing unwanted voices within the statehood agitation.

6.2.5 Patronage as "soft repression"

The introduced approaches display the importance of party-organisations in institutionalising reward and punishment systems, and underline the role of patronage in keeping the organisation together as long as followers continue to believe in the ability and willingness of party-leaders to distribute rewards (cf. Chandra 2003). They also underline the function of political parties and leaders as gatekeepers and intermediaries between state and society. While some point at the enabling role of such brokers to help citizens access state benefits, the literature on one-party regimes and decentralisation underlines the coercive function of patronage in situations, where access to (state) resources is monopolised by one group (Véron et al. 2006; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006; Sadanandan 2012). Although the distribution of resources to loyal followers can help leaders to live up to public expectations and to legitimise their authority, the fear of exclusion makes patronage a means of soft repression and underlines dependency on the distributive party-system (Greene 2010; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Wenner 2014). The withholding or blocking of access to developmental state resources can be regarded as a form of soft repression as it increases the (anticipated) opportunity costs for joining the opposition or openly voicing critique (Levitsky and Way 2002). Literature on the criminalisation of politics suggested that this state capture is often supported by

the use of threats and violence (Berenschot 2011a). As I will show in the following analysis, however, violence against rivals is not necessarily (and only) an expression of hostility towards them but also a means in the inner-party competition for scarce patronage rewards.

Equipped with these concepts I now display how the *Morcha* established a resource monopoly over developmental resources in Darjeeling, and its effects on the party's ability to stay in power. I concentrate on the time between 2008 and 2012, when the DGHC and local *gram panchayats* were led by a government-appointed administrator/secretaries and lacked an elected counterpart. I complement the discussion by statements recorded after the GTA elections in July 2012.

6.3 Capturing the state

In order to analyse how the capture of developmental institutions in Darjeeling enabled the GJM to sustain its mobilising function, I begin with displaying how GJM leaders described "development" as a means for maintaining political support. I then turn to a detailed description of how the GJM established a "resource monopoly" over developmental resources. This includes a description of the rules of access to these resources, the ways of distribution, and the role of the state administration in this. The captured institutions include projects channelled through the DGHC and other district level departments such as the Public Health Engineering (PHE) besides schemes such as the *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and other welfare schemes such as the *Indira Awaz Yojana* (housing scheme), funds for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS), or disaster relief. I choose the capture of the district level DGHC and the locally implemented MGNREGS as two case studies. Chapter 6.4 analyses how such practices were experienced and interpreted by potential recipients and opposition members.

6.3.1 The need to deliver

Running a party is expensive. The GJM for example covers expenses for political work, including paying for transportation and food during demonstrations or public meetings. One major expense is probably the Gorkhaland Personnel (GLP, see Chapters 3 and 5), a force of supposed 13,000 (*TT*, 29.6.2012) young men and women formed in 2008, who are paid a salary of 1,500 to 1,700 INR per month (*TT*, 12.11.2012). *The Telegraph* estimated a monthly expense of 2.21 crore INR (22.1 million INR) for the GLP's salaries only (*TT*, 29.06.2012). Further, accounts of party supporters suggest that they expect their leaders to share their (presumed) wealth with them or to help them out in times of financial crises (see Chapter 5). Many of the GJM-party workers I spoke to praised "*dājū"* (Nepali for

elder brother) Bimal Gurung for giving them some money (usually some thousand rupees) when they met him, and expressed their expectations to benefit from the party (e.g. by getting contracts or jobs). Also other party leaders such as the zonal presidents distribute money to their clientele. In 2013, Pravesh* (previously a zonal president and since August 2012 an elected councillor (*sabhashād*) of the GTA) told me that he spent about 10,000 INR a day providing help to needy persons, or to finance party activities. Earlier, when he described himself as a “social worker”, who “helps the poor people”, he had also pointed at the instrumental use of welfare activities:

> To sustain our party we simply need something...practical thing I am telling. Tomorrow, why do these people support us? If there is some improvement in our economic condition, if our roads are build, if we are given water [...]. Ultimately, to sustain a party, the grassroots level is important. If you cannot care for deprived people [...] there will be a problem. If we bring these [schemes from the government] people will be happy. And they say: who did this? The GJM did this. (interview, 10.4.2012)

He described himself as a leader, who was working for the people, instead of sitting above them. Also Bimal Gurung described a “good” leader as a person who works “for the benefit of people” (interview, 7.7.2012) (compare the debate on his “masks” in Chapter 5). Development should be “practically” done and needs-based (ibid.). At a public meeting to celebrate the establishment of the GTA, he stressed the party’s role as a middleman with the authority to channel development for the benefit of the public: “We are only the medium. We are only there to provide, to speak and to feed” (speech, 21.7.2011).

All this raises the question of where the GJM leaders get their money from to finance these activities, which Pravesh described as necessary to maintain his support base and to establish an image of able and benevolent provider of development and welfare. When I asked Pravesh this question he appeared slightly hurt. Agitated, he then extensively explained how margins from his private business helped him to meet such expenses. Later he justified taking percentages from contractors as he would re-distribute this money to needy persons and supporters. Also Bimal Gurung stressed that the money came from his (private) tea, fruit and vegetable plantations, cow and pig-farming or small-contractor business in sand trade (interview, 7.7.2012). But the immense expenditure of the GJM can obviously hardly be met without some other sources. Upon my question, Bimal Gurung admitted that some of the money also came from his “friends: contractors, rich people” whom he requests “to give something for the poor” (ibid.). There are also indications that the party benefitted from “donations” from the tea proprietors (although Gurung heavily denied such accusations).

Accounts from party-workers and party rivals equally suggest that also the DGHC – despite lacking an elected body or chairman after Ghisingh’s resignation in 2008 – functioned as an important source of

finance and patronage for the GJM. Drawing on accounts from party-workers, -leaders, and rivals I now sketch how the DGHC functioned after Ghisingh's resignation in 2008 till its succession by the GTA in August 2012.

6.3.2 A bureaucracy of patronage: the DGHC

To illustrate how the GJM established a resource monopoly over developmental funds I draw on accounts of party-workers and leaders and on my own observations. These suggest the existence of a corruption network institutionalised around the DGHC, which not only includes GJM members but also state bureaucrats and contractors.

When the DGHC was established in 1988 under a State Act it consisted of a general council and an executive council, which were supposed to carry out its solely executive functions in the areas of socio-economic and cultural development. The DGHC's general council consisted of 42 members (amongst them 28 were elected councillors and 14 were government nominated), the chief executive, the vice-chairman, and a government appointed executive officer. The chairman, vice-chairman, and seven members from the general council's 42 members (5 nominated by the chief executive councillor, 2 by the government) formed the executive council (Sarkar 2013).

After elections to the DGHC were not held as scheduled in 2004, in March 2005 the GNLF councillors had resigned to increase pressure on the government to make Ghisingh the "caretaker" of the DGHC (*The Hindu,* 20.3.2005; *TT,* 24.3.2005). After Ghisingh, too, resigned from his post as caretaker chairman in March 2008, the DGHC was scraped of all its once elected leaders. To fill this governmental vacuum, on May 11, 2008 the West Bengal government appointed the IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer B.L. Meena (till then the sub-divisional commissioner from Jalpaiguri) as the new caretaker administrator. In the absence of new elections to the council however, neither the general nor the executive council were functioning afterwards. Also the respective DGHC departments continued functioning only administratively but lacked any supervision by elected representatives. This made the State appointed caretaker administrator the only *de jure* authority to decide on the distribution of the still-available funds (granted by the State and central governments). Besides, the district administration continued to handle those departments which were not under the purview of the DGHC.

A DGHC report suggests that also after 2008 its funds continued to be utilised: in the financial year 2007/08 a total sum of about 906.6 million INR and in 2008/09 of 590 million INR[150]. The DGHC report, however, lacked clarity on the total sums of money sanctioned and lacked detailed

[150] These sums exclude the money utilised under the MGNREGS, which was 1,155,689,000 INR in the financial year 2007/08 and 140,673,000 INR in 2008/09.

information on the ends of expenditure in many places. Numbers, too, were partly incoherent. Although till 2009, the GJM publicly demanded the dissolution of the DGHC, an insider claimed that the GJM increasingly started utilising the DGHC after a massive cyclone (Aila) had caused vast devastations in the Darjeeling hills in May 2009, and people began demanding financial relief. The government had provided 200 million INR disaster relief, which were channelled through the DGHC.

In April 2010, DGHC administrator B.L. Meena accussed the GJM of channelling 65-70 % of the DGHC-development fund (worth 200 crore INR or 2,000 millions INR) to its frontal organisations between 2008 and 2010 (*TT*, 24.4.2010). Gurung, however, denied any authority over these funds. In my interview he instead stressed his role as a mediator who gives "recommendations" to the respective state departments only (interview, 7.7.2012). But accounts of GJM activists underline the perceived centrality of the GJM in channelling developmental funds and schemes. On a Sunday, when I was waiting in the GJM's head office to see whether I could attend a party meeting, some young men entered the room and handed an application for a water-supply project (responsibility of the Public Health Engineering Department) to the office peon. He explained that on a Sunday they could not meet the GJM president and asked them to return later. However, he took their hand-written application and stamped a "received" sign with the date on it. Later, he told me that the bulk of his work consisted of receiving applications for projects from the different *shakhās*[151] and zones.

Applications along inner-party chains of command

The literature review (Chapter 6.2) pointed at the centrality of a (hierarchical) party organisation in channelling patronage and benefits which helps parties maintaining their "mobilising function" (cf. Magaloni and Kricheli 2010, 139). Also in Darjeeling, accounts of party workers suggest the centrality of the GJM's organisational structure. *Shakhā* level party activists had a clear picture of the party's hierarchical organisation: *Prashakhās* and *shakhās* as well as "blocks" are settled at the *gram panchayat* level, zones represent the (former) DGHC constituencies, the *mahākumā* committee is at the sub-divisional level, and the central and core committees at the district-level. The GJM president is on the top of this hierarchy. While the central committee with its 86 members (in 2012) is constituted from representatives from lower levels, a member of the core-committee, which has only 17 members, mentioned that important decisions were taken there. The municipality areas have town and ward committees. The exact organisation below the sub-divisional level differs from place to place, probably to satisfy aspiring local or medium level leaders by granting them posts in intermediary committees. Splits in *shakhās* can also stem from inner-party competition over funds which weaken the party organisation at the ground level. Besides, the GJM has various frontal

[151] *Shakhā* and *prashakhā* are the lowest level party units. One *shakhā* – usually referring to a village – has several *prashakhās*. A larger village can also have several *shakhās*.

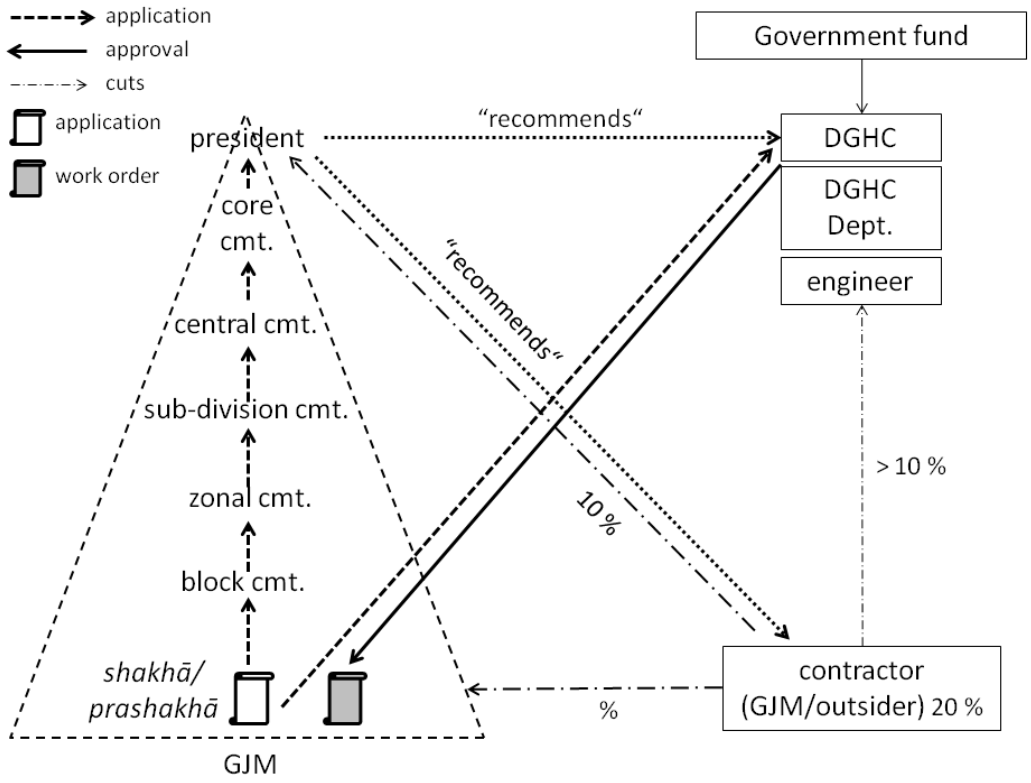
organisations (see Chapter 1). The organisation also plays an important role in channelling applications for developmental funds.

Upon my request, my friend Sachin*, a *shakhā* activist and GJM founding member, hesitantly explained the application procedure to me under the condition of anonymity. According to him, one formal application is submitted in the respective state department (either under the DGHC, or others like Public Works Department or Public Health Engineering). This application is, however, useless without political support of the GJM. Thus, a second application towards the party has to be filed. This inner-party application process proceeds along the hierarchical party organisation (as depicted in Picture 7). To apply for a fund, a *shakhā* needs to file a project application to the block and/or zonal president, who – contingent on his/her support – forwards it to the sub-divisional and then to the central party committees and to president Bimal Gurung, who can forward the application to the concerned DGHC (or other state) department. This means that party leaders at the different levels function as brokers, who structure the flow of resources along this hierarchical chain. Once approved (or "recommended" as Bimal Gurung put it, interview, 7.7.2012) by the president, a local unit's application is likely to succeed at the DGHC or the respective Department. An insider pointed out that this step-wise procedure leaves conflicts about the distribution of scarce funds largely to the sub-divisional (*mahākumā*) committee, which functions as a gatekeeper, and thereby saves Bimal Gurung from inner-party critique[152].

Also zonal presidents or "convenors" could play important roles in the channelling of applications and funds between upper and lower party levels. After Ghisingh's ousting, Gurung and his close aides had nominated them to inofficially (and non-electively) overtake the positions of the former DGHC councillors. An insider explained that these middle-level leaders had been recruited from amongst engaged party activists, mainly founding members, who had successfully established the GJM in their respective places. They were, however, not formally elected by their respective local constituencies. Also Pravesh had not only mobilised support for the Prashant Tamang fan-club (see Chapter 5) but also established the GJM in his place. Now, he saw himself as an intermediary between his "zone" and upper-level party-leadership not only to channel demands but also news to the upper levels:

> *Shakhā, prashakhā*, they are all under me. I am like a bridge. I [know and] convey what is happening at the grassroots, so the sub-division will listen, central committee will listen. Then according to that we react. And if this linkage is always there we [GJM] will always go ahead. (interview, 10.4.2012)

[152] The *mahākumā* committee is also important for maintaining the party organisation. New *shakhās* need its approval and are answerable to the committee, which also facilitates the speedy transmission of reports to the central leadership, suggesting that the organisation also works as a surveillance tool.



Picture 7: Corruption network as described by a GJM activist. Percentages are subject to change depending on the overall size of a project

Yet, not everybody has to proceed along this arduous process following the chains of command. Those with good relations can directly apply to the president. The possibility to jump the established chains of command underlines the presidential form of this patronage system. The centrality of and strong dependency on the party president in this hierarchical system invests him with the ultimate authority to decide on project applications and contract distribution.

Importantly, all local GJM activists believed that without the approval and “recommendation” of the GJM top-leadership their formal applications to the respective state departments or the DGHC would never succeed. In their and also in rival’s opinion opposition parties clearly lacked the power to channel funds and succeed with applicationsThe hierarchical structure of the GJM is also utilised for accessing non-DGHC projects, such as larger State-level schemes. Here activists act as sub-contractors. This can be illustrated along the *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY), a centrally funded and State approved scheme for road construction in remote areas. *Shakhā* members explained that – after a formal tender – initially the main contract is given to a wealthy contractor with State-level permit, who is not necessarily involved with the regional ruling party. To guarantee a smooth implementation of the project (and to avoid any disturbance by activists of the ruling party),

however, this contractor must pay off the ruling party – thus the GJM – who then demands a distribution of sub-contracts to local party units and frontal organisations, mainly the *Yuva Morcha* and *Nari Morcha*, who act as "petty contractors" [Engl.]. From each of these sub-contracts the party workers can cut some profits while the leaders can take credit for bringing a road to the area.

"Recommendation", approval, and cost-estimate

Once, a DGHC project application has been supported by the various intermediary party leaders and reached the president, he has the power to "recommend" (interview, 7.7.2012) it to the respective DGHC department. A *gram panchayat* secretary mentioned that the state-administered institution follows such recommendations due to the lack of any elected district-level bodies (interview, 15.6.2012):

> There is no elected DGHC house [...]. The government thinks that there are people behind him [Bimal Gurung] [...]. The government takes his personal voice as public voice. He makes the policy and the government implements.

GJM activist Sachin also pointed at the involvement of the engineers, who estimate the cost of projects. According to him, the engineers "overestimate" the overhead budget of the future project and sign the approval after it has been completed (regardless of the actual quality) in exchange for receiving their own cut (a practice well-known over India). He complained that starting from providing "good food" to the arrangement of "girls" everything had to be provided to the engineers in order to keep them happy during their field visits.

Tenders, work orders, and contractors

Although all approved projects are publicly tendered, Sachin and other insiders claimed that these tenders were manipulated by the administration, which adhered to the GJM's recommendations on the contractors. In small-scale projects usually groups of GJM-activists (mostly the applicants) became contractors. Larger scale contracts, which demand a larger initial capital investment were given to full-time contractors (who were fast enough to switch sides from GNLF to GJM). Another insider shared that in turn for their financial support during Bimal Gurung's extensive travels and "welfare campaigns" in Darjeeling, they get their bids/tenders accepted for the development projects, which the party president announces during these stays[153]. He shared that in the initial phases of the GJM, hundreds of such contractors came and pledged loyalty to Bimal Gurung (proven through donations). This suggests their importance in the organisation.

[153] Such stays include the expenses for Bimal Gurung's company of GLPs and other party activists (mainly food and transport). The sum can amount to several lakhs of rupees.

Sachin further explained that once everything was settled the applicant receives a "work order" and can start with the project. He and other GJM-workers claimed that of every budget a certain amount of percentages is distributed within the party, including the president (see Picture 7). Also the various frontal organisations receive their share. After project completion the applicants follow the *de jure* path and demand reimbursement for their investment by showing the bills to the DGHC or respective state departments.

Enforcement through intimidation

Critics claim that the resource monopoly was also enforced by the use of muscle power in form of intimidation and threats. This happens usually when GJM activists feel that they did not receive their fair cut from a project. A friend recalled an incident when a non-GJM member (with personal relations to the respective state department) had been granted a small contract in his village. Local GJM members had "disturbed" the implementation by hindering contract workers from attending the work side, and threatened to use physical violence against the contractor, unless they received a share of the overhead expense. Project implementation can also be disturbed when larger scale contract works with higher expenses make it necessary to involve State approved, non-local contractors. These might be disturbed if local activists feel that they did not receive their fair share. To avoid this, upper level leaders usually split bigger contracts into "petty contracts", which are then given to local party-units.

In sum, these accounts suggest that while DGHC projects are seemingly applied for and channelled through the official or *de jure* procedures, the actual decision on the distribution and choice of contractors lies with the GJM leadership only, pointing at their monopolisation of resources. Apparently, these procedures were accepted by the State government. All this happened between 2007 and 2012 when the party was not formally elected as a representative on the district level or for the DGHC.

Inner-party competition

Accounts from local and medium-level leaders suggest that there is a harsh competition for the scarce funds. Both, local activists and zonal presidents (after the GTA establishment the *sabhashāds*) expressed the need to prove their loyalty and obedience to the party and the president to make approvals more likely, a behaviour known (and publicly disapproved) as *chamchāgirī* (see Chapter 5)[154]. When in 2013, after the GTA elections some former party-workers challenged Pravesh, the GTA councillor, by placing TMC flags visibly at the road side he rushed to the side to negotiate with the

[154] Creeping, bootlicking

rebels. He explained that his constituency must remain free from rival party's visible activities as it would otherwise get a "bad name." He feared this would risk exclusion from GTA funds[155]. He interpreted such defections as part of a "bargaining politics" whereby dissatisfied party workers exerted pressure on him to provide more. When one young GJM activist offered to "remove" the TMC flags, an action which can be perceived as intimidation and risk a police case, he, however, declined. In a personal conversation later, Pravesh expressed his personal dislike of all forms of violence but also sadly admitted that he had to "reward" those who used violence, "because they sacrificed something" (i.e. a police case or arrest). This suggests that ironically the existence of opposition parties provides an opportunity for activists to prove their loyalty to the GJM, as they believe that intimidation of these increases their chances for benefits through the GJM patronage system. Thus, loyalty to the party is not only proven by regular participation in party events but also by the use of violence against party rivals.

The state – the enemy?

Although the establishment of the GJM's organisational structure explains how developmental resources are channelled within the party-organisation, ultimately the "recommendations" of the GJM president could not succeed without the consent of the state administration,which was *de jure* in charge of the DGHC from 2008 to 2012.

Pravesh underlined that in order to provide he had to work "hand-in-hand" with the local administration, including the Block Development Office (BDO). A *gram panchayat* secretary aptly stated that

> Only weak persons retain their posts at the department [...]. They say: whatever recommendation the party gives we do so. Because later they need to cooperate with these political people. (interview, 15.6.2012)

Adherence to GJM-orders also results from fear as he continued:

> Administration workers from outside are not afraid, they [GJM] don't know where their houses are. But for local people it is difficult. At times even if we don't want to we have to agree to what the party says. There is a risk factor.

Further, an insider recalled how in 2008 the West Bengal government secretly offered Bimal Gurung the authority to take decisions on the utilisation of the DGHC and other funds, particularly after the cyclone Aila caused large devastations in the hills in May 2009. He claimed that although initially

[155] Such considerations lead to violent clashes at times. When in May 2013, GNLF activists attempted to stage a rally at Soureni, they were allegedly attacked by GJM *goondas* with stones and weapons. Bimal Gurung had planned to visit the place at the same day, suggesting that the local councillor was under pressure to keep the place free of GNLF activities and to prove his "loyalty" (see case study in Chapter 7).

refusing such offers, Bimal Gurung soon enough started to enjoy the authority the government was investing him with, e.g. by engaging in district-wide welfare campaigns, where he distributed developmental resources. This account suggests that the State government is not only a passive "price-producer" (de Wit 1996) in the *Morcha*'s machine politics but itself plays an active role in the corruption network and directly involves in regional elite-construction. This also applies to some members of the local administration, a topic I address further below.

The GJM's reliance on State resources, however, causes a serious trade-off for the party, which becomes apparent in contradictory statements of top-level leaders. Initially, the *Morcha* denied any involvement with the DGHC because this might have raised doubts about its hobnobbing with the very government that they officially challenged by demanding Gorkhaland. Bimal Gurung's and other central leaders' denial of their ultimate authority over the distribution of funds by claiming that they would only "recommend" while the final decision was with the administrator of the DGHC, reflects this. In a speech in June 2012[156], Gurung even openly called upon his followers to stop utilising developmental funds and instead to concentrate on the struggle for Gorkhaland: "We must not run after schemes...we must make this final fight [for Gorkhaland] a success" (speech, 6.6.2012). This statement clearly expresses his difficulties to live up to expectations of factual deliveries in terms of development and contracts, while continuing the programmatic struggle for autonomy. This juxtaposition of developmental and statehood demands is underlined by leaders' attempts to maintain their reputation as capable deliverers of resources. Thus, contrary to above claims, Gurung regularly underlined his authority to dispose of developmental resources in public speeches. For instance, responding to the CPRM's critique of his distribution of development projects, in the same speech he claimed: "Bimal Gurung does not need permission, he orders" (ibid.). In the long run such "double-dealing" (cf. Jeffrey 2010, 135) is not successful, as I show in Chapter 8.

I now turn to a second example of state capture, i.e. at the local *gram panchayat* and ward-levels. This not only reveals the GJM's role in channelling or blocking people's access to the developmental state but also underlines the role of leaders' individual interests.

6.3.3 Personal aggrandisement? The MGNREGS

Besides the DGHC and district-level departments the *gram panchayats* are an important developmental institution. These locally elected developmental bodies receive funds from the central and State governments for development projects and are powerful institutions at the grassroots level. Every five years ward members are elected. These form the *gramsabha* which is headed by a

[156]Gurung held this speech in front of party-activists to condemn the recommendations of the Sen committee and threaten the State government with a revival of the Gorkhaland agitation (see Chapters 1 and 5).

pradhan. In the three-tier *panchayat* system the *gram panchayats* are represented in the *panchayat samiti* at the block level and in the *zilla parishad* at the district level.

As already described in Chapter 1 the *panchayat* system in Darjeeling follows rather exceptional rules. Following the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act (1992) the three-tier system was reduced to an effective one-tier system leaving only the local *gram panchayats* as elected functioning bodies. While the district level *zilla parishad* was completely dissolved, the medium-level blocks lacked elected counterparts of *panchayat samitis* and were represented by the state administrative Block Development Officer (BDO) only. When the elected members of the *gramsabhas* resigned in 2008, the *gram panchayats* were administered by government appointed "secretaries in charge"[157]. Instead of implementing developmental programmes, their function was now largely reduced to the issuing of documents (such as certificates of birth, death, marriage, etc), or supporting applications to the BDO (such as Scheduled Tribes (ST) certificates or Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards). The only large-scale developmental scheme that continued to function was the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS, following NREGS), or "the 100-days work scheme", issued by the central government.

Many accounts of villagers suggested that there was a range of persons, who acted as supportive intermediaries between citizens and the *gram panchayat* for issuing certificates. These included also non- GJM-activists. In contrast to this, the channelling of access to development and welfare funds or government jobs (e.g. teacher) was perceived as an *exclusive* realm of local GJM groups and leaders in most places I studied. I also often came across allegations claiming that welfare schemes such as the *Indira Awaz Yojana* (a housing scheme)[158], the EWS-schemes (benefits for the economically weaker section), the distribution of BPL cards, or disaster relief were controlled by and distributed amongst the local GJM activists only, instead of being granted to "genuine" and needy persons. Such locally implemented schemes provided an apt entrance point to study the functioning of political patronage and the establishment of resource monopolies at the local level. It also allowed assessing the effects this has on perceptions of leaders and the ruling party.

Drawing on a detailed case-study of the NREGS, I now narrate the story of how a group of local GJM leaders captured the scheme and the effects this had on their public authority in the concerned village.

[157] Between 2008 and 2012 these local bodies officially functioned under the District Magistrate, since August 2012 they are under the direct purview of the GTA.

[158] The MLAs (thus GJM leaders) select the beneficiaries for this scheme.

MGNREGS: Official rules and informal implementation

According to the MGNREG-Act (Ministry of Rural Development 2008), the scheme aims at providing a maximum of 100 days employment a year for unemployed persons, while at the same time enhancing small scale development through cash-for-work projects, e.g. road construction, or small scale water schemes.

People willing to work under the scheme apply for a job card and a pass book. Both documents must remain with the worker. To prioritise projects proposed by elected ward-members, the *gram sabha* designs an “annual action plan”. This plan is then to be approved by the *panchayat samiti* (at block level) and the *zilla parishad* (at the district level). Once the projects are approved, ward wise NREGS-committees (including party representatives) are formed. For each project small groups of job card-holders (usually 10 to 15 persons) are formed. These are led by a jointly chosen supervisor, who registers the utilisation of construction materials and documents work attendance in the individual job cards and muster-rolls (MRs). The MRs are submitted to the *gram panchayat* and BDO to request for the final payment, which workers receive via the local post office by showing their pass books. As part of horizontal accountability measures, a vigilance and monitoring committee consisting of respected community members is to cross-check the processes to avoid the utilisation of fake job cards (e.g. of dead persons), the misuse of material, the faking of other documents, or other irregularities (Ministry of Rural Development 2008). So far the official rules.

Equipped with an understanding of these official NREGS rules, I began to compare the actual implementation of the scheme. I was astonished to see how much the actual implementation diverged from the guidelines and the Act. Indeed, against the lack of elected local bodies in Darjeeling those involved in NREGS developed some creativity in implementing the scheme. This became apparent in the variety of informal rules regulating the processes at the ward levels. I studied the NREGS in five different places (all of them tea estates): Four of these villages/wards had a clear majority party (two of them GJM, two of them CPRM), whereas one was mixed with the GJM being in majority but the CPRM still had considerable numbers. I first describe the capture of the NREGS by the single-dominating GJM party in Joubari* village which represents a “worst-case” scenario, before comparing it with other cases.

*Capturing the NREGS in Joubari**

The bumpy ride along a potholed path took me from the main road down along the slope to Joubari tea plantation. Situated at the dead end of the road the village appeared to be pretty remote, with only three jeeps plying to the main road and the nearest bazaar in the morning. Most plantation

workers hardly ever travelled there due to the rather expensive fares[159]. Although one ward of the tea estate had a considerable presence of CPRM followers, the ward where I studied the NREGS was solely dominated by the GJM, represented by a core-group of seven to eight male party-workers, amongst them a GJM central committee member. Although people usually refrained from talking about the "party" or "politics", when I first came to the village the NREGS was a recurrent subject of heated discussions. Apparently, members of the GJM group, who had organised the scheme and chosen the supervisors for the last couple of years, had not paid salaries to all job card holders working under the NREGS but instead kept the money for themselves. This clearly outmatched my observations from other GJM-dominated villages, where workers had not received their *full* salary. When some of the victims complained, the local "monitoring" committee called an indoor-meeting but did not decide to take action against the supervisors or arrange for the payment of victims. Apparently, a local GJM leader was himself a member of the committee. One elder non-GJM activist of the committee later told me that such things needed to be settled (*milāune*) in the village, as otherwise the BDO would punish them by withholding schemes. He also stressed that the withholding of salaries was nothing party-related but a "private and personal" (*vyakti*) issue. Amongst the 12 victims were also a few persons close to the Darjeeling Congress party, who – inspite of apparent threats of the village GJM - took the initiative to complain to the BDO after no other action was taken. Their complaints, however, remained without any avail. An insider, who had been involved with the GJM explained that instead of sacking the *gram panchayat* secretary or filing cases against the supervisors, the approached Congress leader – who happened to be the father-in-law of the concerned *gram panchayat*-secretary – mediated between both sides. Eventually the secretary promised some extra work in future to the victims to settle the case. One of the accused supervisors eventually gave some (but not all) money to some of the victims.

Accounts of villagers and insiders pointed at a corruption network behind this, including the supervisors, the GJM leaders, and the *gram panchayat*-secretary. I cross-checked these accounts with the MRs, which are publicly accessible from the website of the Ministry of Rural Development (Ministry of Rural Development 2013a) and display detailed information on the names of NREGS participants, their work attendance, and payment.

Together, these accounts give the following impression on the NREGS implementation in the respective village. The first step of NREGS capture includes the proposal of projects for the village, which – due to the lack of elected representatives – are brought forward by the GJM group. In compliance with the *gram panchayat*-secretary the same group then nominates supervisors for the approved schemes. Instead of collecting job card holders' work requests at the *gram panchayat*, the

[159] A trip to the main road and back would already eat up their daily salaries of 90 INR.

party workers, who already had 'collected' the job cards and pass-books from their holders, provide lists of "workers" to the *gram panchayat*. Many villagers did not seem to have heard about open registration processes and thereby remained excluded from the scheme. They also did not know where their job cards or pass books were. Once the work started the supervisors filled in the MRs. Cross-checking these rolls with friends from the village revealed that about half of the people mentioned were either dead or had migrated to other places. Other persons mentioned on the MRs did not even know that their names were written there and had never received any payment. Still, the supervisors in possession of the pass-books had not only collected the "salary" for these "fake" persons but also for those who had indeed worked from the post office. The officer at the post-office happened to be a close relative of one of the GJM leaders. Accounts of job card holders suggest that due to intimidation from the group they feared to complain when not receiving their expected salaries.

When I returned to the village one year later, I questioned the *gram panchayat* secretary about these (apparently continuing) irregularities. Denying any involvement or responsibility he instead claimed that such "things" took place between the supervisors and the post-office. He also pointed at the responsibility of the "social audit committee" for securing a proper implementation of the scheme, but I could not find any supporting evidence for the existence of such a committee independent from the GJM. In 2013, in response to a Right-to-Information (RTI)[160] request (initiated by the meanwhile established Trinamool Congress) the concerned BDO denied any irregularities in the performance of the NREGS, ensuring that supervisors were chosen by beneficiary committees and social audits were held after the implementation of the scheme (letter of respective BDO to the District Magistrate, May 2013)[161]. Yet, only six months later, when members of the newly established local GNLF unit pressed for the formation of a monitoring committee and threatened to bring the continuing corruption charges forward to the BDO, the *gram panchayat*-secretary finally gave in. Meanwhile, the TMC had made an entrance in Darjeeling hills and established party units. In this process before the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections, the party leading the State government had apparently tightened the grip on the district administration. This made the *panchayat*-secretary more apprehensive of possible action by the (state-appointed) BDO. Eventually, in a public village meeting he threatened to file a complaint with the police (or First Information Report, FIR) against the supervisors if they continued like before. In the same meeting the supervisors were replaced by persons whom the new GNLF-dominated monitoring committee regarded as more honest. After a few days the hoarded job-cards

[160] RTIs entitle Indian citizens to get information on various matters of interest from a public authority (i.e. government) within 30 days. RTIs are based on the Right to Information Act 2005, which was intended to make the government and administration more transparent and accountable to its citizens.
[161] Retrieved from the official web-site of Darjeeling district (Darjeeling District Magistrate 2013)

and pass books reappeared and were – via the monitoring committee – returned to their respective owners, some of whom had not known about their whereabouts for years.

Accounts from other sites

Also in the other studied villages, the majority party clearly controlled the NREGS by choosing the supervisors (the GJM from amongst their cadres while excluding others)[162], by selecting projects for the annual action plan (while minority party's proposals were rejected by the *gram panchayat*), and by controlling (or even providing) the monitoring committee (if there was one at all). In one GJM majority hold, the party had created an own "NREGS committee" to handle all these issues. Also in other villages this capture happened in consent or with the knowledge of the *gram panchayat* secretaries. Like the Joubari secretary, also they clearly refused to take any responsibility for what happened at the sub-*gram panchayat* ward level (interviews in May/June 2012) and claimed they had no idea of people's and supervisors' party affiliation.

In one ward the *gram panchayat* secretary refused to hold meetings out of fear of clashes between the CPRM – which had a considerable strength – and the GJM activists. When some CPRM representatives urged him to hold a meeting at the ward level to increase transparency of the whole NREGS process by providing information on man-days and material cost, he refused:

> If I attended a meeting which is organised by you [CPRM]...what can I tell them [GJM]? We [government employees] don't have security here... We are not elected representatives, we don't have the right to hold such meetings. (conversation, 30.5.2012)

This did not only express his fear but also pointed at the problem of a lack of elected bodies. In the respective ward, inspite of the CPRM's complaints and their attempt to nominate a supervisor, the exclusive GJM-capture of the NREGS continued. CPRM activists concluded that minority parties simply lack a voice in the political space due to the lack of elected institutions. In the few clearly CPRM-dominated wards, the *panchayat* left the implementation of the scheme to the CPRM.

Main differences amongst the cases concerned were in the degree of community involvement via the village *samāj* and the degree of corruption[163]. Unlike in Joubari, in other party-majority villages (two CPRM, one GJM), activists claimed that the *samāj* was involved in the design of the annual action

[162]In one case the GJM zonal president influenced the choice of supervisors. The selection itself is, however, a contested process inside the local party units and can cause conflicts and dissatisfaction.

[163]In addition to the described faking of MRs, the wrong display of work, or refusal of payment to the workers supervisors can increase their profit by decreasing the quality of work, e.g. by using minor construction materials and taking the remaining material for private constructions or sale.

plan or in monitoring[164]. This, however, only seemed to work as long as there was a clear party majority, as one local GJM leader explained because all members of the *samāj* are with the party anyway" (read: the entire village community supported the GJM). When the *samāj* consisted of members with differing party affiliation – as in mixed party-villages – two *gram panchayat* secretaries saw this as a reason of not involving it in NREGS as conflicts could arise (and thereby excluded minority members). In all cases, however, the final decision on the choice of supervisors and projects was with the respective majority party.

Besides capturing the NREGA at the *gram panchayat* level some respondents alleged that local GJM leaders also monopolised the access to other developmental and welfare schemes. For instance, in different villages, victims of an earthquake in 2011 claimed that – although their houses had been severely damaged – only those "close to the party" had received the State-funded disaster relief. Indeed, one GJM youth leader stressed that local party workers supported the *panchayat* with collecting data and compiling lists of "eligible" fund receivers. In another village, complaints of CPRM activists to the BDO for what they regarded as "fake lists" of victims caused a re-inquiry by BDO. Other incidences of alleged exclusive resource monopolisation concern the distribution of BPL cards. These are provided to citizens designated "poor" according to census-information. Criteria include size of land-holding, type of house, or ownership of consumer durables such as a TV (Ram, Mohanty, and Ram 2009). An insider alleged that in Joubari village, the census questionnaires from 2011 had ended up in the hands of the local GJM leaders before being forwarded to the *gram panchayat* suggesting that the same corruption network was at play, which also restricted access to the NREGS. This way the leaders have a chance to manipulate the questionnaires and make sure that certain persons become "eligible" under the BPL-scheme.

6.4 Reactions and effects of state capture

As shown in Chapter 6.2, various authors (Greene 2010; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010) regard resource monopolies and political patronage as effective means to maintain a party's mobilising function. They also underlined that exclusive state capture through a dominant political party gives rise to a "punishment regime" (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010, 128), where loyal followers are rewarded through access to patronage while rivals are excluded. Political support is bought and enforced to help incumbents/rulers to stay in power.

[164] Although the *samāj* was generally seen as "non-political" (see Chapter 1), in Joubari elder *samāj* representatives criticised the increasing influence of the GJM in this social domain. In another village, *Nari Morcha* members replaced traditional *samāj* functions by involving in domestic disputes.

To estimate in how far the GJM's practices indeed tied activists and followers to the party, I now review reactions of active party-workers, rivals, and (passive) followers, and their perceptions and evaluations of the GJM's patronage. Importantly, the above accounts suggest that in contrast to the GJM's announcement of a "new dawn" in Darjeeling (Chapter 1), its practices of state capture and corruption, and the utilisation of political patronage very much resemble the previous GNLF's practices. This raises the question of why people (again) accepted such practices, which many of them had condemned previously.

6.4.1 Activists

Accounts of party workers suggest that they imagine the GJM as a provider of contracts and development. Mainly young unemployed men (especially from the *Yuva Morcha*) pinned their hopes for economic betterment (in form of resources such as economic benefits, contracts, welfare, jobs, or money) on the party. When I asked local GJM-activists how they gained access to development projects they stressed that one *must* involve the GJM, claiming that "all development goes through the party". Thereby they not only referred to the hierarchical application process but also to the exclusion of non-party members from developmental benefits. Also Sachin and Nirman, the GJM activists from the previous case-study, admitted that their participation in the peace *puja* was largely motivated by their anticipation of economic rewards, even though they despised disturbing the scheduled GNLF event. This again indicates that loyalty to the party is regarded as a means in the inner-party competition for scarce resources. Such belief in the party's ability to provide is also kept alive through regular reports on its developmental activities in the local newspapers.

If the belief in the party's ability or leaders' willingness to provide declines, however, former activists might change the party, which threatens the mobilising function of the GJM. Such accounts suggest that material considerations more than programmatic appeal influence their choice of a party (see Chapter 8).

6.4.2 Rivals

In contrast to active GJM-followers, who expect rewards through their allegiance to the GJM, members of rival parties claimed to be "politically victimised" through the exclusive nature of the GJM's patronage. Local leaders of the CPRM from a communist strong-hold for instance claimed that neither their applications to the DGHC were ever approved, nor did their members succeed in interviews for government jobs. In their perception, the GJM monopolised the developmental apparatus of the district to starve them of projects and to give the impression that they were not able to work for their communities. When Bimal Gurung entered one of the CPRM strongholds in May 2012, angry local activists blamed him for distributing benefits (including money and rice grains)

exclusively to those who joined the GJM. Such allegations point at the other side of the “punishment regime”, namely the exclusion from state benefits due to political affiliations, which makes patronage a means of soft repression. But while CPRM-members were outraged about the GJM’s perceived partisan developmental practices, their biggest critique blamed the GJM for “selling Gorkhaland” for money and personal aggrandisement provided by the West Bengal State government (see Chapters 5 and 8).

6.4.3 Followers

Followers or passive supporters from tea plantations were confronted with the GJM’s resource monopoly mainly at the local level, especially through the NREGS scheme. Surprisingly, at all studied sites their reactions to the GJM’s developmental practices were mixed, reflecting differing degrees of information on the NREGS (and other schemes) and their entitlements. Some praised the GJM for “searching and bringing” the 100-days-work scheme, even in the Joubari case. Some even believed that the money distributed came from the party while others knew that it came from the government. In this context, some praised the GJM for its distribution of development or its support in financial crises.

Against this backdrop many persons did not seem to object to give donations for the party’s “fighting fund”, which the GJM claimed to use for the expenses entailed by organising funds and schemes (such as jeep fares to visit state departments). Although some women unmasked Bimal Gurung’s distribution of development as a tactic to garner votes in the next elections, they expressed their gladness about receiving some attention. When I asked one woman whose name had been mentioned on a NREGS Muster Roll whether she had received the payment for the project, she said surprisingly that she did not even know that her name had been mentioned. Instead of being outraged, however, she rather seemed unsettled. She never openly complained about the scam.

But more often than not, instances of betrayal and exploitation of workers also raised critique amongst the supposed beneficiaries and spoiled the GJM workers’ reputation as benevolent social workers. Regularly, in conversations leaders were accused for selfishness, for ignoring village needs, and for not caring about others. In all studied cases, research respondents morally disapproved of such practices as *ghoṭālā* (cozenage, scam) (see Chapter 5). Also the term *peṭko vikās* (literally: development of the stomach) has become an ironic popular idiom to describe such leaders, who became “fat” after “eating” from public funds while real development was stalled.

But despite such dissatisfaction, hardly anybody dared to openly oppose the ruling party. Kundan, who runs a small shop in a road-side village explained the public silence as follows:

> The poorest stay [with the GJM] out of fear (*ḍarle*) or because they need support with applications at government offices. The better off stay out of compulsion (*karle*), to retain their jobs or get contracts. Others stay to gain more power and money (*raharle*, out of appetite/motivation).

In his opinion, both – the fear of victimisation which expressed a perceived dependence on the GJM, as well as instrumental considerations of those, who want to gain by showing loyalty to the party – explained the passive compliance and active support to the party. Indeed, several times respondents expressed their fears of losing their jobs (e.g. as teachers), when openly criticising the GJM. A victim of the NREGS corruption case in Joubari shared that he had been personally intimidated by a local GJM-group member.

Often, when I asked critical respondents why they did not openly oppose local GJM leaders, they claimed that such critique would reach the "upper" party-levels (*māthi pugchha*), which suggested that they feared the party-hierarchical organisation as an effective surveillance tool (see Chapter 7)[165]. In the same context, respondents claimed that "staying with the 'majority' [Engl.]" would be safe and expressed apprehensions of multi-party villages, reflecting their memories of the violent inter-party atrocities committed during *chhyāsī* ('86) (see Chapter 3). Such accounts not only underline people's perceived dependencies on the party but also point at the repressive function of patronage. The outcome is a social silence, which further facilitates the corrupt practices of local GJM leaders, often in cooperation with the local administration.

Being a recurrent object of misuse and corruption, it is not surprising that rival parties such as the CPRM or TMC try to gain ground in Darjeeling hills by criticising the lapse in implementation of developmental schemes, e.g. by planting posters, sending delegations and written inquiries to BDOs, staging demonstrations[166], or filing RTIs. This renders especially the capture of the NREGS not only a strategy for the ruling party to maintain loyalty amongst its activists. It also provides an entrance point for rival parties to challenge the political dominance of the GJM, rendering it a highly politicised institution. Paradoxically, inspite of all these irregularities, the national Ministry for Rural Development awarded Darjeeling district for "leadership in improving MGNREGA implementation" in January 2013 (Ministry of Rural Development 2013b).

[165] This fits to Way and Levitsky's (2006) understanding of coercion (i.e. repression) as rooted in "scope" and "cohesion". Scope describes the incumbent's effective reach over territory and society, as well as his economic power. Cohesion refers to the level of compliance within the ruling apparatus. In this way, the GJM's fine-grained party network based on political patronage and resource monopolies provides both, scope and cohesion, and strengthens the coercive element of the GJM's rule.

[166] The TMCs activities can be regarded as part of a larger campaign started by the CM Mamata Banerjee, who regularly publicly announces that she wants to bring "development, peace, and democracy" to Darjeeling hills, and that she "wants to see Darjeeling smile" (*The Hindu,* 2.7.2012; *The Hindu*, 14.7.2012; *The Hindu,* 13.3.2013) (see Chapter 8).

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the role of resource monopolies over the developmental state as a means to sustain the GJM’s mobilising function. I analysed this in the context where the GJM’s perceived rollback on the Gorkhaland agenda had entailed a loss of normative legitimacy and forced the party to complement its normative appeal through other means. The analysis found that that patronage – channelled along the hierarchical party organisation – played indeed a key role to maintain the organisation. The mobilising function of the GJM is kept alive through its supporters’ belief in leaders’ capability to access scarce resources and on their trust in leaders’ willingness to distribute these. Their perception that “all development goes through the party” expresses their expectation to benefit by being part of the (party) organisation. Also rivals perceived the GJM as the only option to access state resources, which underlined its authority. GJM supporters underline their loyalty by participating in party events or placing flags visibly at their houses. Like in a “patronage democracy” (Chandra 2003), they invest in a (political) identity to access scarce resources. Activists also underline their commitment by employing “muscle power” (here: the intimidation and violent oppression of rivals) for securing their access to resources in the inner-party competition. The party becomes a business and supporters form a “transactional group” (Bailey 1969, 75).

The GJM established a range of informal rules for the appropriation and distribution of resources. It invested the ultimate authority with the party president, underlining the presidential form of the patronage system. In a clear display of “punishment regime” (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010, 128), both supporters and rivals perceive only those who are loyal to (or useful for) the party as eligible for rewards while rivals are excluded. The bureaucracy of political patronage sustains soft repression. Such exclusion is enforced through the use or threat of violence and people’s fear of being victimised. Against the backdrop of the often poor socio-economic background of plantation workers, the wide-spread unemployment and violent memories of *chhyāsī* (’86), this ultimately contributes to a culture of silence. The lack of accountability mechanisms at district and local levels and the lack of elected bodies enhances these limitations of political space (cf. Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006). Ultimately, this not only stabilises the GJM’s resource monopoly but also allows local leaders to utilise the resources for private gains. Although rival parties’ complaints open up little spaces for voicing discontent these usually remain confined to the local newspapers.

The whole system of dependencies and political patronage is institutionalised through the autonomous council (DGHC), and other developmental schemes, mainly the NREGS. Accounts of GJM leaders and local bureaucrats suggest that they form corruption networks in cooperation with contractors.

The patronage system only received some cracks after opposition parties gained more strength in Darjeeling after 2012. For instance, in Joubari the formation of a GNLF-dominated monitoring committee constricted the GJM’s appointment of NREGS supervisors. At the same time the State-ruling TMC’s attempts to make administrators (including the BDOs) more accountable towards the government (see Chapter 8) increased fears amongst *gram panchayat* secretaries. This underlines the importance of opposition parties at the local level as a way to create local accountability structures (cf. Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006; Sadanandan 2012). Another source of concern for GJM leaders are public perceptions of their “selfish” behaviour and involvement in too much *ghoṭālā.* These perceptions suggest that leaders’ are either not capable or willing to “deliver” leading to a loss of legitimacy (Wenner 2014). This diminishes the mobilising function of the party, a case I discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.

Another weakness of the system is its vulnerability to a stop the external resource flow necessary to sustain its patronage system (Burnell 2006, 553;Levitsky and Way 2002, 7; Gerschewski et al. 2012). The *Morcha*’s dependence on regular resource supplies through the State government ultimately causes a serious trade-off for the party, as its need to act as a responsible political party to ensure a regular supply of financial support to the autonomous councils stands at odds with its need to continue with the Gorkhaland agitation as a radical movement leader. This inherent conflict, which brings the *Morcha*’s normative and factual bases of legitimacy into conflict results in the above displayed “double-dealing” (cf. Jeffrey 2010, 135) of the party. This underlines, that pillars of authoritarian rule are not always complementing and reinforcing each other, as claimed by Gerschewski (2014) but can also be in conflict with each other.

The discussion above suggested that to sustain the supply with (state) resources the *Morcha* must oppress dissent so to present itself as the sole voice of the statehood agitation towards the government. In this reading, violence against rivals is not a spontaneous outbreak of public anger but a calculated means to access resources. Such hard repression has not only effects on the possibility of a socially *inclusive* statehood movement. It also stands at odds with the party’s proclamation of a “democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian” movement. Instead of living up to public aspirations of liberation from exploitation, development, and hopes for a strong and united movement, such practices increase social and political cleavages between a small elite of political entrepreneurs and the masses. The following chapter analyses how the GJM attempts to solve this contradiction and explores hard repression against rivals as a third strategy for ruling.

7 Silencing dissent II. Hard repression and fear

The foregoing chapter explored the role of political patronage and the establishment of resource monopolies as a means of the GJM to maintain its mobilising function. I showed how through the principles of reward (for loyal supporters) and punishment (of rivals) such patronage also becomes a means of soft repression, which contributes to a silence amongst the ruled. This chapter turns to one more strategy, which studies on authoritarian regimes identified as important for incumbents to stay in power: the use and experience of hard repression (see Chapter 1). I will show how this strategy functions as a second element in Darjeeling's silencing-politics.

7.1 Stones on the GNLF

When in early May 2013, several GNLF activists – amongst them women and children – were travelling to Soureni (a small bazaar close to Subash Ghisingh's birth place, see Map, p. xxi) to open a new party office – as they say with permission of the administration - , they ended up in a violent clash with some GJM activists leaving several people injured. GNLF leader Shusma* was amongst the victims. When we spoke, her hand was still bandaged. She recollected the events:

> When we went to Soureni some men were sitting on the road...and others were standing on the roofs of the houses, throwing big stones from above. The place's GTA *sabhashād* was also there and assembled all these *keṭāharu* (young men). We were down on the road [and] I told them: 'Don't destroy your own future for 500 or 100 rupees. Listen to what we have to say and if you don't like it just leave [...]. We don't do such things to you.' [...] The police, seven or eight men, were also afraid of them. And then we were already attacked, the police had to go aside... We also had many *keṭāharu* [...]. We picked up the stones from the road. They showed us knives, rods, *khukurīs* [...]. So ours threw the stones back at them [...]. In Darjeeling it is so difficult, how can you do an agitation (*āndolaṇ*) when the own brothers don't recognise each other?

Conversely, the GJM blamed the GNLF for initiating the violence, and alleged them for "destabilising the region" (Roshan Giri, cited in: *The Hindu*, 6.5.2013). After the clash the GJM called a one-day strike in the hills. Threatening an indefinite strike, the GJM pressed for the arrest of involved GNLF supporters in the clash and an immediate transfer of the respective police officer-in-charge, saying that he had "acted in a partisan manner" (ibid.). After the arrest of eight GNLF supporters (and 24 GJM supporters) and a promised inquiry into the role of the police officer-in-charge, the GJM refrained from calling the strike, citing the scheduled visit of the Chief Minister (CM) to Darjeeling in

the coming week as a reason to "keep the hills peaceful" (Roshan Giri, cited in: *TT*, 7.5.2013). Apparently, the CM had asked the GJM to refrain from the strike (ibid.)[167].

Incidents like this seem to stand in stark contrast to the GJM's proclamation of a "democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian" agitation. In 2008, at a huge public meeting in Siliguri Bimal Gurung had announced: "The age of gun and *khukurī* is gone [...]. Now it is the age of the pen [...]. We will work according to democratic principles" (speech, 7.5.2008). As mentioned in Chapter 5, party-leaders would regularly perform Gandhi-*puja* at the start of public meetings to reinstate this image. Usually, a big picture of Gandhi is displayed at the side of the stage, and top-level leaders wave incense sticks in front of the picture, taking a subservient position and bowing down. The whole exercise is accompanied by sounds of holy Hindu chants[168]. As shown in Chapter 5, such proclamation of "non-violence" and "democracy" had helped Gurung to distinguish himself from Ghisingh and the violent agitation of '86, increasing his appeal to the masses.

Yet, the GJM's proclamations of "democracy" and "non-violence" stand in stark contrast to public allegations of violent oppression. Such accusations do not only include the alleged hindering of oppositions' public meetings or stopping opponents from filing nominations for elections[169]. Critiques also blame the GJM for torching party rival's properties, beating them up, and even killing them. The shocking climax of such open and highly visible form of repression was the public slaughtering of Madan Tamang, the well-known president of the AIGL, at a public place in Darjeeling town. Tamang's attempts to hold meetings at the usual venue at Chowk Bazaar in the town had been spoiled several times by members of the GJM *Nari Morcha*, who staged sit-ins there. He then decided to hold a meeting at Club Site, a public place close to the tourist location Chowrasta, inspite of threats and warnings.

This happened shortly after the GJM had agreed to negotiations on an interim-council in March 2010. Although *Morcha* leader Bimal Gurung rejected any responsibility, various accounts hold that in the morning of May 21, 2010, and despite the presence of some police men and the West Bengal Governor in town, a mob of GJM activists started throwing stones at Tamang. One of them eventually took out a long, sharp sword (patang) and slaughtered him in front of the public. Coloured

[167]The State government had sent two platoons of para-military forces to the hills to maintain peace and order (*TT,* 7.5.2013).
[168] Inside the party there are, however, voices demanding a more violent approach. Members of the *Yuva Morcha* told me that they would welcome a violent movement, making freedom-fighter S.C. Bose an idol. They also voiced this publicly while stressing the need to "sacrifice" (GJM meeting, 14.6.2012). One member shared that the GLP had been created to threaten the State government. I was not sure whether such proclamations were part of a pressure strategy of the GJM or indeed indicated open defections from the "non-violent" course.
[169] In July 2012, CPI-M leader Suman Pathak was hindered by GJM-activists to file his nomination for the GTA elections at the Kuresong sub-divisional district court. He only succeeded after police-protection was granted, including the reservation of a road for him to go to Kuresong (Business Standard, 7.7.2012).

pictures of the injured leader were displayed on front-pages of local newspapers the next day. The main accused in the case, Nicole Tamang, mysteriously disappeared from police custody. When asked by journalists why the police, who were present there, did not interfere, the Inspector General of the North Bengal Police asked the journalists to inquire with the "higher authorities" (*Himalaya Darpan*, 22.05.2010). He also claimed that Tamang was assassinated by the GJM (ibid.)[170]. Often, when I asked persons from both urban and rural areas why they did not oppose the *Morcha* even if they were not satisfied, they referred to Tamang's murder, saying "if even people like Madan Tamang can be killed, and the culprits are still not arrested, then what will happen to people like us?" This underlined the disciplinary function of this killing in the public memory.

Indeed, persons accused in murder and wanted by the police, were moving freely in Darjeeling. Once, I even met one of them for an interview. Upon my question why he was not hiding a local GJM leader explained that whenever the police came to arrest him he got a warning in advance and could hide. To me, the warranted leader did not appear like a murder-accused hiding from the police, eager to arrest him. Many people believe that the West Bengal government was using the Tamang-case to exercise political pressure on the GJM leaders, whose names had been mentioned in the First Information Report filed by Tamang's wife (including Bimal Gurung, his wife Aasha and General Secretary Roshan Giri).

But why does the GJM apparently rely on such forms of hard repression, which stand in stark contrast to its proclaimed "non-violent" ideals? What role does hard repression play for maintaining support for the party? How is violence perceived and interpreted by those affected?

This study already outlined several roles and uses of violence by the GJM and its leaders. Studies on "strongmen" in South Asia showed that the open display of physical violence or power helps leaders to gain reputations as able deliverers for their communities (Hansen 2001; Michelutti 2010; Price and Ruud 2010b; Vaishnav 2012). Drawing on these, in Chapter 5 I had shown how Bimal Gurung's reputation as a "strongman" appealed to the population, who saw in him a capable and strong leader to challenge Ghisingh. In Chapter 6, I demonstrated that the use of intimidation is not only a practical

[170] Initially, the investigation was taken up by the West Bengal Criminal Investigation Department (CID). In January 2011, on a direction of the Kolkata High Court, the State government handed it over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), a national agency. In July 2013, doubting the commitment of the CBI, Bharati Tamang, the wife of Madan Tamang, sought a transfer of the case to a Special Investigating Team or National Investigation Agency, and has moved the Supreme Court in this issue (*The Hindu*, 15.7.2013) but – till date – without any avail. However, following a directive of the Supreme Court, the trial court has been shifted from Darjeeling to Kolkata. The charge sheet names 31 *Morcha* leaders and activists. One of them was found murdered in December 2011. Only in February 2013, five of the absconding accused were arrested by the CBI (*The Hindustan Times*, 15.02.2013). In June 2013, 13 accused surrenderd, followed by five accused in Sptember 2013 (*TT*, 18.6.2013; *The Statesman*, 6.9.2013). By January 2014, two of the accused were still absconding. Of the remaining 27 accused, nine got bail, and the others were in prison in Kolkata (*TT*, 30.01.2014).

means to support the GJM's capture of developmental state resources. Hard repression of rivals also functions as a means to show loyalty in the inner-party competition for the access to party-channelled state resources. In this chapter I add another dimension of violence: I argue that the performance of acts of hard repression not only serves the GJM to gain an image of an organisation of "strongmen", necessary for instigating fear amongst the population of Darjeeling. I contend that the GJM paradoxically also utilises incidences of inter-party violence to underline its "democratic" and "non-violent" approach. Proclamations of "non-violence" help the party to defame rivals involved in clashes and – through (re-)interpretation and framing – to portray itself as defender of such principles.

To underline this argument I draw on Brass' (1997), Hansen's (2001), and Gorringe's (2006a) research on communal riots and violence in South Asia. These suggest that violent performances and framings of such violent events are an element in the struggle over resources and political power. In the words of Brass (1997, 6), violence has a "functional utility". After reviewing these approaches in Chapter 7.2, I display perceptions of hard repression amongst urban and rural population and assess how such practices function as a strategy for ruling by instigating fear. In Chapter 7.3.2, I explore how the GJM organises hard repression. In Chapter 7.4 I analyse how GJM leaders interpret and frame incidents of hard repression of rivals in order to underline their "non-violent and Gandhian" image. The conclusion outlines the effects of hard repression and suggests that it is only partly successful to maintain the *Morcha*'s authority.

7.2 Violent performances, interpretations, and the "functional utility" of violence

While the previous chapter was mainly concerned with forms of "soft repression", I now explore "hard repression" (Tanneberg et al 2013) or "high-intensity coercion" (Way and Levitsky 2006) (see Chapter 1). As mentioned in Chapter 1, hard repression involves an element of public performance, which demonstrates the ability of the exerciser to punish, sometimes displayed in a "spectacular" way (Hansen 2001, 65). While in Darjeeling spectacular incidents – such as the murder of Madan Tamang or disturbance of rival parties' meetings – are often reported in the media and involve a certain degree of police action, i.e. by stopping clashes or arresting culprits, this chapter is also concerned with less-spectacular instances of mundane every-day repression through the threat of using (physical) force against persons or property.

I now introduce two approaches to understand the utility of such violence in politics: first, Hansen's (2001) work on the *Shiv Sena* in Mumbai, which points at the performative nature of violence as an

open display of force; and second, studies on the interpretation and framing of violence as a means in the struggle over resources and legitimacy (Brass 1997; Gorringe 2006a).

The first approach I am drawing on to understand the "functional utility" of violence stems from Hansen's (2001) study on the *Shiv Sena* in Mumbai. The *Sena* employs violence in the form of attacks on opponents and sometimes murders (often directed against Muslims). Hansen describes such violence as "performative", a public spectacle, aiming to establish the *Sena* as a spectacular, public force (ibid. 65). At the same time violence becomes a popular idiom and a means to recuperate masculinity (Hansen 1996, 162). Through its appeal to an aggressive masculinity, the *Sena* offers young unemployed men an "ideal of an assertive, violent mode of being urban" (Hansen 2001, 9), generating and stabilising their identities as *sainiks*. Such "performative violence" is one major strategy for the *Shiv Sena* to underline their authority to commit acts of violence with immunity and to display their "popular, manly assertiveness" (Hansen 1996, 159).

This suggests that violence is not a spontaneous outbreak of uncontrollable anger but rather consciously exercised, organised and planned (see also Tambiah 1997; Gorringe 2006a). The public murder of late AIGL president Madan Tamang, an outspoken critic of the GJM, is a horrific example of such "performative violence" while at the same time suggesting the "immunity" of the accused culprits, the GJM party leadership.

While Hansen focuses on the performance of violence itself, Brass (1997) studies the interpretations and framings in the *aftermath* of riots. In his study on communal riots in North India he underlined the instrumental importance of the interpretation and framing of violent events in the struggle over resources and power. Riots, he claims, become "communal" or "ethnic" only when *branded* as such by politicians, victims, and the media. Violent events provide leaders with a chance to identify "convenient scapegoats" (ibid. 7) and alleged perpetrators, which then function to justify the exercise of state authority to confine so identified dangers. In this way, interpretations of violence as "communal" or "ethnic" have important consequences for state policies and resource distribution (ibid. 5). Violent events become instruments in politicians' struggle over resources and power, riots have a "functional utility" (ibid. 7). This makes struggles over the acceptance of certain versions and constructions of violent events "inherently political" (ibid. 5).

Such an understanding shifts the focus of research from the "causes" of riots to the interpretations in the aftermath of violent events and the interpretative framework in which these are contextualised. By referring to these frameworks local incidents are transformed into categorical events (ibid. 27), such as expression of "communal hatred" or of the "lack of law and order" due to a corrupt police

and state. Usually, all sides involved blame the initiation of violence on the others, while denying their own responsibility.

Similarly, Hansen (2001) describes the attempts of the *Shiv Sena* to reject any responsibility for communal riots and instead blame it on the spontaneous and uncontrollable human nature. In the party's rhetoric, violence against Muslims is framed as "retaliation against perceived injustices", "defence", "spontaneous and popular" and, therefore, "uncontrollable". The *Sena* brands it as a reaction of ordinary people to underline that it was not responsible. By creating clear and sharp lines between "friends and foes" such violence is also perceived as "purifying" (Hansen 2001, 65).

Hugo Gorringe's research on the *Dalit Panther Iyyakkam* (Dalit Panther Movement) in Tamil Nadu shows that not only the interpretation of riots is contested, but also the question of what actually *counts* as "violence" (Gorringe 2006a; Gorringe 2006b). He proposes that "violence" itself is not a universal but socially contested and ambiguous category, blurring the boundaries between what counts as "legitimate" or "illegitimate" violence (Gorringe 2006a). "Violence takes many forms and is always contested and invested with different meanings" (Gorringe 2006a, 134). For him, violence not only encompasses "threats and dominant practices" (ibid. 121), physical assaults, massacres, but also verbal attacks/taunts, which are bound up with fear and the expectation of physical attacks.

Going beyond the interpretation of the functional usefulness of violence in the struggle over resources and power, Gorringe (like Hansen 2001) points at the identity-shaping effects of violence. He claims that processes of identity formation "feed into violence and are affected by it" (Gorringe 2006b, 119): violence forges a sense of identity and knits groups together by establishing clear boundaries between "us" and "them" (Gorringe 2006a, 118). In this way it shapes people's perceptions and actions and thereby becomes a way of seeing the world (ibid.). This points at an understanding of violence, which goes beyond the actual act of violence and understands it as continuous with normal social relations (see also Spencer 2007, 119) and as embedded into mundane day-to-day situations. As such, it is not extraordinary but becomes "part of a common currency of interaction" (Gorringe 2006a, 133).

The above discussed accounts stress on the importance to look beyond violent acts themselves, and understand them as conscious and (often) planned incidents in a broader context of struggle over power, resources, and meanings. This includes understanding violence not as an exceptional and isolated act but as continuous with social relations.Thus, for researching the effects of violence it is important to account for the differing interpretations of violent acts. Only such attention to the social meanings associated with and interpretations of violence, helps to understand how it shapes individuals' views on the world and ultimately their response to hard repression.

Drawing on accounts of victims, I now turn to the question of what forms of hard repression the GJM is employing. To access the effects of such practices on the GJM's authority I display their interpretations and how they affect, and become part of mundane political and social practices (Chapter 7.3). Following the claim that violence is not spontaneous but planned (Hansen 2001; Brass 1997) I then explore how the GJM organises hard repression and the role of *goondas*. Chapter 7.4 focuses on the interpretations and framings of violent events (Brass 1997; Gorringe 2006a). Here, I analyse how GJM top-level leaders re-frame accusations of hard repression to invest in their image as followers of "democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian" principles.

7.3 "Fear psychosis" and *goondas*

To understand the utilisation and effects of hard repression in Darjeeling I now display accounts of non-party workers and victims. These underline the importance of hard repression in the formation and sustenance of a "fear psychosis". More than physical violence itself, however, the threat and fear of it shapes social and political agencies. I complement these accounts with exploration of the role of *goondas* in maintaining the GJM's reputation as a "strongman" party.

7.3.1 Incidents and perceptions of violence

I was in the office of the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) in Darjeeling town and talked to Laxman Pradhan, the general secretary. It was July 18, 2011, the day when the GJM signed the agreement on the GTA. I asked him about the difficulties in operating a minority party in Darjeeling. "No doubt, everyday there are threat letters [saying] 'Do not talk too much', 'Do not talk against this', 'Be careful!' [...]. This office was attacked three times." He showed me some deep cuts probably from *khukurīs* in the steel frame of his table and in some steel furniture. "Look, all this was cut [...], the pictures of our leaders, the furniture, the TV, the computer-set, [...] all was destroyed. There is no law and order here, there is no democracy. The administration is not ok."

Bharati Tamang, the widow of the killed AIGL president Madan Tamang, joins us: "The GJM accepts the GTA agreement upon his coffin." While hundreds of GJM activists celebrated the day of the GTA agreement, the mood in the office was depressive. "How did they win the 2011 assembly elections?" I asked. "The GJM gave money, and on the other hand terrorised people, saying, 'If you (*ta,* derogatory) won't vote for us you will not stay here tomorrow".

Such incidences of politically motivated violence seem common in Darjeeling. They do not only include the ransacking of rivals' offices – like Laxman Pradhan showed me – but also of rival leaders' private property. Especially during the takeover of power through the GJM in 2008 several houses of

GNLF leaders were burned. After the TMC began to intensify its activities in Darjeeling since 2012, TMC activists were exposed to physical attacks. In March 2013, several TMC activists in Kalimpong were attacked allegedly by a group of GJM activists, whereby leader Chewan Bhutia from Kalimpong was stabbed and seriously injured (*ToI*, 7.3.2013). But rival leaders are not the only ones, who become victims of violence. Many people in Darjeeling town recalled the ransacking of Glenary's, one of the town's famous heritage restaurants, allegedly by GJM followers after its owner continued to openly support the GNLF. Another unpopular story regards the "dress code" whereby the GJM had directed people to dress in "traditional Nepali attire" in October 2008. Those who refused got their faces blackened by *Morcha* activists (see Chapter 5). Also the establishment of the Gorkhaland Personnel (GLP), a kind of pseudo-police force of loyal GJM activists formed in 2008, was seen with suspicion.

The fear of violent retaliation is deeply entrenched in people's psyche. Owners of various shops and restaurans in Darjeeling town stressed that they usually only participated in GJM-called *bandhs* (general strikes) out of fear that their shops and vehicles will be ransacked by the party-picketers. Interestingly, town dwellers blame the threat or use of violence mainly on people from the tea plantations. Binita*, a restaurant owner explained: "When there is a *bandh*-call, our boys from the town say 'close the shop' but they don't beat up people. But those from the villages are rowdies, they carry sticks and people are afraid." She continued:

> Those coming from down there (*tala*), those from the *kamān-bastī* (tea plantations and rural villages), they always think negatively. Their mindset (*vīchār)* is not nice. They don't understand. Staying in the villages they do too much 'party' [Engl.]. Therefore our mindset doesn't fit. These people destroy a lot here. The town-boys are not like this.

Such differences are expressed through the popular idiom of "*talako keṭāharu*", literally translated as "the young men from down". This idiom reflects not only the topographical divisions between the town (usually up on the hill) and the tea plantations (on the slopes below the towns) but also suggests perceived differences in class ("upper" versus "lower").

Some of my urban friends held a lack of education, unemployment, and people's desire for easy ways to earn money as the causes for the supposed inclination towards violence of *talako keṭāharu,* who came up to the town and act as *goondas* of the GJM, e.g. extracting money from businessmen as "donations"[171]. Other places strongly associated with violence are the previous CPI-M strongholds of the 1986 agitation. Tea plantations such as Chungtung, Rangmook, or Moonda-Basghari, which

[171] Tukvar tea-estate on the northern slope below Darjeeling town or Karbir tea-estate below Kurseong town are regarded as particularly dangerous. Significantly, Bimal Gurung stems from Tukvar, underlining his muscle-man reputation amongst the town people.

resisted being overrun by the GNLF, still carry a "dangerous" designation in the popular imagination[172]. Such popular idioms and imaginations of a geography of violence indicate social cleavages between urban and rural population in Darjeeling. However, Binita was not afraid of *talako keṭāharu* only, she did not trust her own neighbours too. When we spoke about politics, she always lowered her voice when one of her neighbours came, fearing that once her critique reached leaders' ears she might be punished. Several times she warned me to not talk about politics to everybody. "Peace is only outside but behind the curtain there is no peace", she said. Only when we were alone, she and her husband loudly criticised the ruling practices of the GJM.

In both urban and rural areas people expressed their fear of the GJM. One young plantation worker shared his dissatisfaction with the local GJM leader but upon my question why he did not oppose him, he pointed at the leader's rowdies: "Without rowdies there is no politics", he claimed. Another common concern was the fear of "social boycott" through the GJM. A female shopkeeper from a GJM strong-hold village shared: "We need our neighbours for mutual help. If I have a problem I can ask my neighbours and the other way round [...]. The party will tell others to do [social boycott]. They can even kill people." Like Binita and many others, she perceived the GJM's organisational network as a surveillance tool: "Here the *shakhā, prashakhā* and central they are joined (*joḍieko chha*). Whatever talk is here it will reach up (*māthi*) and Bimal Gurung. Therefore people are afraid and cannot speak." Upon my question why they did not join another party, several female plantation workers responded: "*Mārīhālchha",* which means as much as "You will be killed (without any question)", or "*hundaina*" (this is not possible).

Another common way to express fear from the GJM is reference to threats (*dhamkī)*. These are usually (unspecific) verbal threats spoken out by local activists or leaders to those who raise critique (e.g. at corruption), such as "be careful" or "don't try to be clever". In anticipation of punishment (both social and physical) or victimisation most respondents regarded it as the safest way to "stay with the 'majority' [Engl.]", fearing to stand alone. One plantation worker shared: "We are simple people. We go where the 'majority' is. Then there is peace – we don't want unrest." Importantly, this apparent lack of political agency became visible in some comments, which suggested certain indifference when it came to party-preferences. Some people claimed that: "We are all *La-la-Mu-Mo*" (Mu-Mo standing for *Mukti Morcha*, and La-la a suggestion of "whatever") – as long as it was the majority party. People coped with this situation by excluding discussions on "politics" from their

[172]Such public imaginations and memories make violence an integral part of Darjeeling's historical-political landscape and are held alive by martyr stones (usually with a *khukurī* on top) or memorials of those murdered for political reasons (e.g. C.K. Pradhan in Kalimpong and Madan Tamang in Darjeeling).

conversations, as this might cause conflicts, or somebody could listen. Critique and dissatisfaction with the regional leaders were kept *bhitra* (inside) but not brought *bāhira* (to the outside).

Also one journalist recounted stories of being intimidated by the GJM. Yet, while the intimidation of the print-media seems to be rather low, in response to critical reports by private TV channels from Kalimpong, Bimal Gurung enforced a shut-down of these in Feburary 2012 (see Chapter 8 for details).

Urban dwellers expressed their longing for peace, especially with reference to the dependence of their livelihoods on tourism and business. Binita explained: "That's why the GJM won the [2011 assembly] elections. If other parties had won, this would have caused unrest and conflicts." She added: "Peace in Darjeeling will only prevail as long as there is money coming." A young teacher from a GJM-strong-hold village aptly summarised such apprehensions:

> How many things we cannot say here, there is not that same kind of freedom here like in your country. This is our burden. We know how freedom should be. We are bound. If we talk on one issue then they start oppressing us. The politicians here are bad [...]. Madan Tamang was killed. He was a big man [...] [and] there is nothing in killing people like us. (interview, July 2012)

Such accounts underline that paying lip-service to the ruling party is at least partly induced by fear of repression. Accordingly, some respondents felt it was an obligation to take part in GJM activities, as one of my friends claimed, even if this includes evicting activists of rival parties (especially GNLF) from the village.

Such statements underline deeply entrenched fears of inter-party violence (in multi-party villages) and reflect shared memories of atrocities committed during the '86-movement. The fact that generally whole households (or "houses", *ghar* in the vernacular) join a certain party, underlines attempts to avoid political conflicts within families[173]. Significantly, however, most accounts on violence mentioned the *fear* of retaliation rather than its actual personal experiences through the GJM. It is mostly rumours and assessments of the probable physical strength of the ruling party, coupled with spectacular incidents of murders or burned houses of rivals, which frame what some in Darjeeling call a "fear psychosis". Shyam*, a long-time observer of Darjeeling politics, explained: "There is a very low confidence level [amongst people] due to the political system because everything in the hills tends to be politicised." Thus, like Gorringe (2006a) claimed, the fear from violence becomes a form of violence itself. Such fear not only shapes individuals' political agencies but also affects social behaviour.

[173] This clearly differs from Alm's (2006) study on a Tamil Nadu village, where families diversified their political affiliations in order to be able to benefit in case of a change in ruling party (ibid. 104).

Although neighbours are regarded as important source of support in case of emergencies or social events (see description of the *samāj* in Chapter 1), personal relations with neighbours are characterised by a lack of trust. Therefore "politics" or '*party'-ko kurā* (talk on the party) is usually excluded as a topic for conversation. Often, when I asked respondents why they did not oppose the ruling party inspite of being critical, they pointed at a lack of "unity" amongst individuals. Many feared that even if they agreed on jointly speaking up, in the end everybody would draw back leaving you alone/isolated (*eklai*). In this context they claimed that "nobody wants to take a risk" ("*'risk' [Engl.] kosle linchha?" –"*Who will take the 'risk'"?), pointing at the fear of standing alone against the majority or a group of sworn-in leaders while the rest remains silent.

Such fear of retaliation even affects those better-skilled persons, who migrated in search of jobs in the large towns of the plains. I remember a conversation with a man from Darjeeling, who had been living with his family in Delhi for several years. He did not particularly like staying in Delhi and was full of enthusiasm when talking about what he could do in Darjeeling. But when I asked him why somebody like him with a good education and good ideas did not return to build something up in Darjeeling, he explained: "Because I am afraid." I asked him "Afraid of what?" He took a second to reply, and then said very seriously: "Afraid of being killed". I heard similar statements of Nepalis travelling in the train to Darjeeling. During the journey they were criticising the GJM and Gurung for their corrupt and violent rule. One of them, who was employed in the Indian Army, then added: "Once we are there, we cannot talk like this anymore. Then we have to keep shut, too." The fear, it seems, is tied on the place. Upon entering Darjeeling it exercises its power and makes even those silent who earn money and live outside. Nobody wants to take a risk.

It is this deep entrenchment of fear, which some in Darjeeling call the "fear psychosis". It is a fear, which shapes people's identities and political practices as the longing for security suggests to "stay with the majority", even if the dominant party is morally despised off. In the imagination and experience of people, violence is normal and to be expected. To repeat the words of Gorringe: violence (and fear of it) becomes "part of a common currency for interaction" (Gorringe 2006a, 133). Living without fear becomes the exception and peace an instable condition, which needs to be preserved by silence and passive compliance with the ruling party.

7.3.2 Organising violence: *goondas*

Many respondents mentioned their fear from the GJM's *goondas.* I now explore the role these take to maintain the GJM's reputation as a "strongman" party and research their relations to party-leaders. The description is based on my own observations and accounts of party-insiders. Although I

spoke to persons identified by others as *goondas,* they were – quite understandably – rather hesitant to speak about their involvement in violence.

Who is a 'goonda'*?*

In South Asia, the term *goonda* is usually used for criminals, rowdies, gangsters, or "muscular political leaders" (Michelutti 2010; Berenschot 2011a). Berenschot defines them as "small-time criminals [...] who rely on the threat or use of force to protect their illegal livelihoods" (Berenschot 2011a, 260). In Darjeeling, people usually consider a *goonda* as a bored, unemployed man – often an alcoholic or drug addict – with a reputation of using violence for economic and private gain and who is often (but not always) employed by political parties. It is generally used in a demeaning way and *goondas* in Darjeeling are in no way respected but only feared individuals.

The designation *goonda* can, however, be misleading as it refers to different types of persons. In Darjeeling I came across at least three different types of *goondas.* The first two groups are loyal to the ruling party and enter a patronage relation with its leader/s. They fulfil different functions, some of them related to violent oppression of rivals. In the first party-loyal group fall those who are full-time employed by politicians, mainly as bodyguards, but also as participants in pre-planned violence. These men permanently accompany the leader. Also the Gorkhaland Personnel (GLP) (see Chapter 6) is often considered to fall into this category. They are heavily dependent on the party for money and protection from the police.

The second party-loyal group comprises those, who are called upon if the party needs to present its strength and majority. These "part-time" *goondas* are usually taken from the unemployed youth, many of them assembled under the *Yuva Morcha*. They might also include alcoholics or drug addicts. In contrast to the first group they do not hold a reputation of being "strongmen", but rather function to underline majority strength in a group. Following the discussion of Chapter 6, which underlined that violence is a strategic means in the inner-party competition for patronage benefits, it makes sense to believe that their loyalty to the party is based on hopes of benefits in form of contracts or government jobs (e.g. as teachers) or aspirations to climb up in the party-hierarchy. In the words of Bailey, they form a "transactional group" (Bailey 1969, 75) (see Chapter 5). This underlines the patronage nature of the party-*goonda* relationship.

The third group of *goondas* consists of "freelancers" – criminals (murderers, extortionists, drug-dealers, etc.), who are not necessarily loyal to one particular party but can use their power and reputation to gain from different parties and switch sides easily. They hold reputations of being dangerous, and political leaders try to get close to them or to appease them in order to prevent them

from turning against them. One of these "freelancers" shared that he regularly went to meet leaders of different political parties in his town and claimed that he always returned with a bunch of money or a contract. He did not pledge loyalty to one particular party and kept away from politics while maintaining a low profile.

Riot networks

Accounts suggest that the GJM relies heavily on its hierarchical organisational network for mobilising its "muscle"-power. Such networks resemble in some ways the "riot-systems", which Paul Brass identified when studying communal riots in North India. He found that riots are undertaken by "specialists", who form "institutionalised riot-systems" (Brass 1997, 9). Riot actors are drawn from different pools of persons, who cover different roles, "including provocateurs, monitors, informers, "riot captains and thugs," provisioners of transport and liquor, criminals, bomb manufacturers, journalists and pamphleteers, graffiti writers, and distributors and plasterers of scurrilous posters" (ibid. 16). Mobilisation of these "specialists" is done along networks (ibid. 16).

Also the *Morcha* seems to involve a whole set of actors for organising inter-party clashes. Important actors seem to be the jeep-drivers (many of whom are member of the Joint Action Transport Committee, a frontal organisation of GJM), who bring activists to the respective venues; medium or upper-level leaders (who allegedly provide alcohol to the activists); and the activists turned *goondas* themselves. It makes sense to believe that the mass-support for actively disturbing the rivals' meetings is mainly mobilised from the "part-time" *goonda* group, which is strong in numbers. Many people also believe that such events are largely sponsored by the full-time employed GLP. Accounts of witnesses of these events suggest that the *Morcha* mobilises unknown non-locals for exercising physical violence (by burning houses, disturbing meetings, etc.) to make it more difficult for victims to identify them when filing police cases. Members of this group also help enforcing *bandhs* as picketers (although this is not solely a male activity).

But are the GJM-leaders also *goondas* themselves? The insights I gained suggest that most GJM councillors, top- and second-rank leaders are no *goondas* but employ them (except for Bimal Gurung, who holds a strongman reputation). This differs from the GNLF, whose leadership had consisted of GNLF-veterans of the '86-movement, who themselves held strongman reputations (Niraj Lama, interview, 14.5.2013) led by Ghising as a non-*goonda*. This suggests a GJM policy, which discourages *goondas* from becoming higher-level leaders themselves. One respondent assumed that Bimal Gurung probably wanted to avoid risking being toppled by another strongman.

All 'goondas'? Defying orders to use violence

Although the discussion above underlines the repressive approach of the GJM, it would be wrong to denounce all GJM members as *goondas* and oppressors. Instead, many activists claimed that they would not like instances of violent oppression of rival parties, sometimes by taking reference to their religion (as Buddhists or Christians). In one case for example, a local leader had even refused to carry out an order from above (*māthi*") (without mentioning the exact source of the order) telling him to burn down the house of a local GNLF leader. Instead, he pretended that there was too heavy police presence in the village and thereby could avoid the GNLF leaders' house being burned. Later, he suspected that he lost out on developmental contracts from the GJM because of this unwillingness to use physical violence against rivals. Still, he stayed with the party hoping to gain some benefits, until he eventually resigned in 2013.

7.4 Violence in the *Morcha*'s "democracy". Framings and interpretations

I now turn to the question of how the GJM leadership handles allegations of inter-party violence – e.g. instigated through the *goondas* described above – and how such incidences ultimately serve them to maintain their image as "Gandhian" leaders. Hansen (2001), Brass (1997), and Gorringe (2006b; 2006a) pointed at the performative character of violent events and their utilisation through (re-)interpretation. In discussing the contradictions between the *Morcha*'s rhetoric and its actual conduct, I first draw on Gorringe, who showed that the meanings of "violence" themselves are contested. Here, I explore what "non-violence" and "democracy" actually mean to the GJM and its leaders. Following Brass' and Hansen's stress on the interpretations and framings of violent events, I then show how GJM leaders try to frame violence against party rivals in a way that serves them to maintain their image as "democratic".

7.4.1 "Democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian"

When I asked Bimal Gurung what a "democratic movement" (*gaṇatantrik āndolaṇ*) actually means, he explained:

> Democratic means that people are given to speak in a free manner, to walk in an open manner, to put visions in an open manner [*khullā prakārle*] [...]. Before our party was established people's throat was cut, they were shot. [...] We want democracy, this Gorkhaland we want to give. May people be able to talk/speak, may they be able to do everything...ask and inquire. (interview, 7.7.2012)

He clearly understood "democracy" and "non-violence" in contrast to the violent movement of '86:

> Whom did we kill since we started our movement? Whose house did we set afire? In an 18 months movement [1986-1988] 1200 persons died... Today we gave the right to talk to everybody. Say – is this not democratic? (ibid.)

Interestingly, Gurung also claimed not to be in favour of a single-party rule, as there was "a need for checks" and critical responses to the party's strategy (ibid.).

Also other accounts of GJM leaders suggest a similar understanding of "democracy" and "non-violence" as formulated in contrast to the violence during the GNLF-led 1986-movement. As discussed in Chapter 3, violence at that time was not only directed against the state and its executive (police, CRPF) but also against those, who refused to support the agitation (mainly CPI-M supporters).

Activists of the women's wing (*Nari Morcha*) saw themselves in a special role to ensure "non-violence". In interviews they underlined that they as women (unlike men) were incapable of using violence as happened during the movement of '86. Thus these activists related their gender to the party's non-violent approach, opposed to an inclination to physical violence as predicted by masculinity. On the other hand, *Nari Morcha* activists have been instrumental in *gheraus* of state offices or rival leaders' houses (see Chapter 5). This suggests an understanding of violence in terms of physical violence, only. Indeed, most of the interviewed (male and female) activists regarded *gheraus* or "social boycotts" as non-violent.

The displayed accounts clearly underline the attempt of GJM leaders to distinguish themselves from the GNLF and reassure the "non-violent" path of the movement for Gorkhaland. But how do they respond to the apparent contradiction between such claims and recurrent incidences of hard repression against rivals and the public fear?

7.4.2 Framing violence as "non-violence"

Brass (1997) regards the contestations about the interpretation of violent events as a means in the struggle over reputations and resources. To explore how the GJM leaders explained and interpreted inter-party clashes and the possible effects of such framings on their authority, I again draw on the case study of the peace *puja* already introduced in Chapter 6. A pick-up truck carrying GNLF activists had forcefully been stopped by some GJM activists from reaching a venue for a scheduled party-meeting. The discussion is complemented by accounts of leaders in newspapers and interviews, including Bimal Gurung, Harka Bahadur Chettri (GJM spokesperson and since 2011, an MLA), and other central committee members.

Denying responsibility

After having witnessed the forceful stopping of the GNLF pick-up by a mob of men in Bagargaun*, I returned to the peace *puja* venue, where the holy Hindu chants were still being played. When I asked a sub-divisional GJM leader about the clash, he angrily criticised the administration's "undemocratic" decision not to grant permission for a GJM meeting while "supporting opposition leaders", who only wanted to create unrest (*ashantī*):

> The GJM is doing a peace *puja* here to avoid unrest, to create peace in this area [...]. The GNLF came to disturb the peace *puja* and to place their flag here. We are peaceful but they come to create violence.

Ironically, when I asked him how "democratic" the GJM was, he claimed that everybody could hold a meeting openly as long as they got permission from the administration, but added: "But the GNLF's attempts to disturb the peace *puja* are not democratic."

Also Bimal Gurung, whom I met for an interview a few weeks later, initially denied having disturbed the GNLF's meeting, claiming: "*Āre* [exclamation of surprise], we never disturb a meeting of any party. One can run a party, one can speak openly." On my insistence, however, he eventually tried to justify the GJM's *puja* by proclaiming the GJM's peaceful intentions while underlining the party's power over the place. It is worth displaying excerpts from this interview at length:

Gurung:	A [party, *author*] meeting [...] was not done [...]. A *puja* can be done everywhere. I can also put a *mandir* [temple] here.
Author:	But you did the *puja* at the same venue [like the GNLF], yes or no?
Gurung:	[...] Who can stop people doing a *puja*? [...]
Author:	Members of the central committee and the *Yuva Morcha* were also present at the *puja* [...].
Gurung:	Everybody can go to a *puja* [...].
Author:	And why didn't you let the GNLF celebrate the foundation day?
Gurung:	Go and ask the GNLF: 'Why are you creating unrest in such a way today?'[...] The persons going to that place wanting unrest [...] this is only at Bengal's direction [*ishārā*].
Author:	Who created unrest?
Gurung:	GNLF is creating it by staging a meeting there. There are no people for staging such meetings in Darjeeling. People are told bad things (*bekārko kurā*). Today these persons were evicted from the hills [...]. This means: this

person has nothing. So why is he disturbing? And instead of fighting isn't it nice to do a *puja*? [...]

Author: So this means you wanted to stop their meeting?

Gurung: *Puja*...we didn't want to stop their meeting [...].

Author: And couldn't you have done your *puja* at another place?

Gurung: [...] In our area we can do a *puja* everywhere. [...] We gather wherever there is a big ground [...]. After so many years of politics people were not allowed to say anything...see...The [DGHC] councillor C.K. Pradhan was murdered after using the word of Gorkhaland [...]. Are these GNLF people democratic? Why did C.K. Pradhan die? This needs to be asked. (interview, 7.7.2012)

Such accounts clearly underline the GJM leaders' attempts to reject any responsibility for violence against rivals. Instead they blamed the rivals and the administration. By stressing on the *puja* Gurung did not only try to depoliticise the whole event but also to underline the "peaceful" intentions of the GJM, which did not plan the event as "violent" repression of the GNLF. Eventually, however, Gurung indirectly admitted that the GNLF should be denied the right to hold meetings as they themselves had allegedly oppressed or even killed rivals and those demanding Gorkhaland.

Another instance, where the GNLF and the police were blamed for violence was the already discussed (Chapter 7.1) inter-party clash at Soureni in May 2013. While the GNLF accused the GJM of attacking, the GJM blamed the GNLF for initiating the violence, and alleged them for "destabilising the region" (Roshan Giri, cited in: *The Hindu*, 6.5.2013). Roshan Giri, the general secretary, claimed:

> GJM president Bimal Gurung [...] was scheduled to visit Soureni to review the progress of development activities there. But GNLF activists tried to disrupt his visit and suddenly staged a rally without prior police permission [...]. Instead of taking any action against them, the police lathicharged GJM leaders and party workers. (ibid.)

This way, the GJM leaders not only used the Soureni incidence and the peace *puja* to discredit the GNLF by accusing it of initiating violence and acting against the law, but also helped the GJM to project the West Bengal government as biased and "undemocratic" and making the GJM appear as an innocent and oppressed victim. Such accusations complement GJM leaders' critique at the government for sometimes refusing permission for public meetings[174].

[174] Such permissions have especially been denied for meetings in the Dooars and Terai (officially to prevent communal riots between anti-Gorkhaland people and Nepalis) and also in the hills, usually, when another party had been granted permission to hold a meeting at the same venue. For instance, when in April 2012 the GJM had tried to stage a meeting in the Dooars to press for the areal inclusion of some mouzas in the new GTA despite being denied permission it had resulted in clashes and police action against activists the party organised a protest-rally in Darjeeling town, while condemning the government for its "undemocratic" methods.

Another strategy to handle accusations of violence is denial of the central party-leadership's responsibility. According to a central committee member, the party leaders did not like *"jhagaḍā"* (quarrels, fights) as it was bad for the party. He claimed that accusations of violence were invented by rivals to give the GJM a bad name. He claimed that the central leadership even sent respected central committee members to appease violent situations. When confronted with my observations from the peace *puja*, and the Soureni case, he eventually admitted that "young people cannot be controlled [...].There are always clashes in politics, not only in Darjeeling" (interview, 13.6.2013). Also another central committee member (being an accused in the Tamang murder case) stressed that the central leadership would not sanction violent party-activities and claimed that "Bimal Gurung doesn't know everything" (interview, 9.6.2012), indirectly implying that local leaders disturbed rivals without the president's knowledge. Both accounts underline that – even if violence was exercised by party-members – the central leadership was not to blame.

Another way to deny accusations of politically motivated violence is describing them as "personal conflicts" and thereby depoliticising them. It indeed makes sense to believe that sometimes local fights between individuals or smaller groups, which arise from personal conflicts (often fuelled by alcohol) are prone to be politicised (i.e. being interpreted in terms of party-politics) by the media or higher-ranking leaders. But I also came across an opposite case. Here, a young GJM activist offered a GTA councillor to remove rivals' TMC-flags and "make it a personal issue". This indicates that the active "personalisation"/"privatisation" of political issues (thus their depoliticisation) can function as a strategy to keep certain politicians outside the purview of criminal persecution.

Justifying violence

In a few instances, when confronted with evidence of repression, leaders tried to legitimise violence instead of denying it. In late January 2011, when I confronted Harka Bahadur Chettri (then GJM spokesperson) about people's fear in Darjeeling town during a recent *bandh*, he justified it with the need for unity in a movement:

> This [people afraid of speaking out] is the most undesirable thing. But at the same time you should not lose sight of the fact that until and unless you have complete control…that's politics, in politics that is a bad thing [...]. Dissenting voices are always welcome in politics, without that the democracy cannot be. But, in a movement, if you have too much of dissenting voices, it will head nowhere." (interview, 7.2.2011)

Also a GJM core committee member, whom I interviewed in 2012, stressed the need for "unity" in the movement (*āndolaṇ*) to be successful, indirectly implying that all dissenters should work under the GJM-umbrella. Both accounts try to justify violence with the need of a unified "movement" (*āndolaṇ*) as different from a contentious multi-party politics. Thus, the leaders' reference to the

Gorkhaland "movement" (*āndolaṇ*) is an attempt to justify their use of hard repression[175]. The leader then made excuses about the action taken against the GNLF by pointing at their miserable performance during their rule and alleged them of receiving money from the TMC, suggesting that – in the case of the peace *puja* – they had no right to celebrate their foundation day. Also Bimal Gurung regularly blamed the CPRM for its violent background in the agitation of '86 while accusing its leaders (then CPI-M) responsible for not stopping bloodshed. Denying rivals the right to complain seems a common strategy to justify such actions, which works as a means to keep the place free of such "bad" party-activities. By drawing such sharp divisions between the "rightful" GJM and "despiceable" opponents, the GJM's strategy resembles the *Shiv Sena*'s attempts to "purify" place (Hansen 2001).

A last instance of justification of hard repression I came across was framing it in a pedagogical way. After I switched off my recording machine, a GJM leader explained the need to use violence: "If a small child doesn't learn, it is not sufficient to give *miṭhāī* (sweets) but you must beat it with a stick. This is in our blood, otherwise people won't understand."

Such attempts for justification also concern soft repression such as "social boycott". Urmila Rumba, a leader of the *Nari Morcha* (and later GTA councillor), acknowledged that social boycott could be a form of violence in certain cases. She then justified that this measure was rather used to avoid "peace-break" by securing that certain persons are left alone, i.e. not disturbed or challenged by others. In contrast, she claimed that cases of total social isolation (including refusal of water, transportation, etc.) stemmed from personal conflicts, which were "given the name of the party. But I don't know about this" (interview, 3.4.2012).

7.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the role of hard repression of party rivals as a strategy in sustaining the GJM's majority support. It complements Chapter 6, which identified patronage and the establishment of resource monopolies as one strategy to maintain the *Morcha*'s mobilising function after its perceived compromise on the statehood agenda and the entailed loss of normative legitimacy. To approach these issues I followed Brass' (1997) proposal of the "functional utility" of violence as a means to access resources, Hansen's (2001) emphasis on violent performances and reputations, and Gorringe's (2006a, b) elaborations on the differing interpretations of violence and its relation to identity-formations.

[175] This resembles Geschewski's (2014, 28) claim that ideology can justify the use of hard repression.

The discussed case studies and accounts suggest that the GJM uses hard repression to render rival parties and opponents invisible. *Goondas* are instrumental in intimidating rivals and give the GJM the image of a "strongman" party, reflected in public fear of intimidation and victimisation. This fear is not only sustained through rumours and actual incidences of violence but is deeply grounded in experiences of violence during the movement of '86. Together, this creates a "fear psychosis" as defining property of people's identities, which translates into their day-to-day interactions and political practice. Against this backdrop, hard and soft repression form the bases of a politics of silencing, which aims at bringing the population behind the GJM in the name of the Gorkhaland agitation. They help ensuring the *Morcha* the place at the forefront of the movement and making it the sole State-recognised representative of the people of Darjeeling and underline their usefulness in accessing resources.

The hard repression of rivals serves the *Morcha* not only to underline its image as a "strongmen" party, reputed to use physical violence against defectors and spreading fear amongst the population. Paradoxcially, party-leaders also try to utilise such events to underline their proclaimed "Gandhian" and "non-violent" approach. Leaders attempt to utilise instances of inter-party clashes to design images of victims, oppressed by an "undemocratic" State government, and of peace-keepers, who make sure that "bad" elements in form of opposition parties do not create a base in Darjeeling. These rival parties, they claim, had lost any right to exist due to their previous involvement in corruption and violence against Gorkhaland lovers. The responsibility for clashes is entirely blamed on these rivals, whose attempts to hold meetings are construed as directed against the principles of democracy and non-violence. Violence thus does not only serve the *Morcha* to discredit rivals by portraying them as "violent" and "undemocratic" but also to invest itself with the image of defenders of "peace" and "democracy", keeping alive the Gandhian myth. In this sense, non-violence serves as a grand story-line for the GJM helping it to defame rivals while presenting itself in a glorious light. This underlines Brass' and Gorringe's arguments on the variety of meanings associated with violent events and the role of (re-)interpretations to gain reputations as means in the access to resources.When I told her about such contradictory stories, one friend in Darjeeling aptly commented: "Here 'truth' depends on how strong the army is. Legitimising it lies in the most violent hands." Contradictions, it seems, are part of the political game itself.

But violence does not only have a functional utility for the GJM. Allegations of rivals hold that also the West Bengal State government was using criminal cases against the GJM leaders to control the party. This not only concerns the arrest of more than 1,200 GJM activists and leaders during the August 2013 revival of the Gorkhaland agitation (see Chapter 1) but also the Madan Tamang murder case. For instance in January 2013, Mamata Banerjee was confronted with GJM followers shouting

Gorkhaland-slogans during a public function at Chowrasta; the same afternoon she invited Bharati Tamang (widow of late Madan Tamang) to Kolkata to talk about the murder cases' progress (see Chapter 8). Many in Darjeeling believe that the State government utilises the murder case as a means of pressure against the GJM leaders whose names figure in the FIR. Thus, whenever the GJM poses demands on the State government, the CM could threaten them with providing evidence on the case (e.g. secret phone tapings of GJM leaders) to the inquiring agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which overtook the inquiry in January 2011. This suggests a dependency of the GJM on the government not only in terms of resource flows (see Chapter 6) but also when it comes to the protection from criminal persecution of its leaders and activists.

Yet, the GJM's attempts to frame and (re-)interpret hard repression against rivals are only partly successful. Accounts of non-party workers suggest that they lost faith in the party's Gandhian image and instead regarded it as a party using violence to stay in power. Instead of garnering respect through strongman tactics (cf. Michelutti 2010) violence becomes an entrance point for public critique. This complements observations from studies on competitive authoritarianism, which found that hard repression was not a useful means to sustain authority as it was too costly and weakened the legitimising bases of a ruler (Tanneberg, Stefes, and Merkel 2013; Gerschewski 2014). Thus, the *Morcha*'s attempts to frame and interpret violence have not succeeded entirely. Rather, "non-violence" and "democracy" function as a myth to hold on for some party-workers in order to morally justify their engagement in a party, which is increasingly perceived to use repression against its proclaimed enemies. Ultimately, instead of propping up its authority, the use of "money" and "muscle power" provided an entrance point for the formation of critique amongst the population. Such public critique increased after the GTA agreement in July 2011 and the loss of areal struggle over the Dooars' territory. This is dealt with in the next chapter.

8 Limits of “money“ and “muscle“? Breaking the silence

8.1 Changing colours in Darjeeling

When I first travelled to Darjeeling in January 2011, the whole landscape had been painted in the colours of the GJM. Signboards and posters demanding Gorkhaland were painted in the GJM’s green-white-yellow and its flags were fixed to most houses in both rural and urban areas. Signs of other parties were almost invisible in public spaces. Rival parties’ public programmes such as meetings or demonstrations were hardly ever taking place and if at all, then it was not at the political centre of Darjeeling, the Chowk Bazaar, but either in the plains or only as smaller local indoor-meetings. The hills were ruled by the GJM.

In Chapter 5, I had explained how the GJM and Bimal Gurung ascended to power and became the leading voice of the demand for Gorkhaland in Darjeeling after years of GNLF’s dominance. In Chapters 6 and 7, I explored how the GJM maintained this position despite being increasingly criticised for compromising on the statehood agenda and how it limited the spaces for other political actors through means of soft and hard repression. I identified the establishment of developmental resource monopolies with the help of the DGHC and *gram panchayats,* and the use of hard repression against rivals and defectors as strategies for ruling. These strategies were contrasted with local perceptions and experiences of the GJM’s rule which displayed the influence the party had on people’s daily lives. These were expressed in people’s difficulties to speak up against perceived corruption and exploitation due to fear of endangering their livelihoods or security. In this context, the discussion also identified the striving for benefits as important factor influencing people’s choice of political parties. Such factors also help explaining why the GJM won the elections to the new Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in July 2012.

An insider had foreseen that the GTA would cement the GJM’s power over Darjeeling for the coming years. Also I expected the new council to regularise the patronage- and resource-flows within the party so to stabilise its mobilising function by officially “legal” means while continuing to exclude rivals from those developmental benefits channelled through the new council.

When I returned to Darjeeling in June 2013 – about one year after the GTA establishment – however, the political colours in the hills seemed to change. While driving towards the hills I spotted green GNLF flags and garlands. More surprisingly, huge TMC posters welcomed CM Mamata Banerjee, who had recently visited the hills (Picture 8). In the small road-side village Bagargaun* one electricity pole even carried three flags, one each of TMC, GNLF, and GJM. Further up in the hills, it was less colourful

but there seemed to be less flags all together. Later, when I met Binita* in her small restaurant in Darjeeling town, she excitedly whispered: “Miriam, have you heard the most recent news? Bimal Gurung has married again! She is much younger than him. I heard she is from the GLP.” She seemed to enjoy telling this news about such perceived morally despicable conduct of Darjeeling’s big man.

Also articles in the local newspaper regularly mentioned defections from the GJM to rival parties, illustrated with pictures of party-flag-holding defectors. Meanwhile, after the GTA agreement in July 2011, other regional parties had formed a new alliance, the Gorkhaland Task Force (GTF), amongst them the AIGL, CPRM, and BGP carried on with the demand for Gorkhaland (see Chapter 1). Also the 2014 *Lok Sabha* election results show that the winning margin of the GJM was declining in contrast to previous years (see Table 1, Chapter 1). They point not only at a possible come-back of the GNLF but also show a new political organisation, the Darjeeling Dooars United Development Foundation (DDUDF) headed by academic M.P. Lama, in the hills.

But why is it that after attaining the total and formal legal control over the GTA (and the associated resources) the GJM’s support seemed to dwindle? Why would people join minority parties? Why was there an open revival of the GNLF, the very party which had been ousted from the hills in 2007/2008 and since largely remained silent and invisible? Why would people who had been fighting for autonomy and Gorkhaland now join the TMC, the very party that has ever since been opposed towards the creation of a new State? Could these defections from the GJM be an indicator for an increasing influence of the State government in the region, expressed through the establishment of TMC-units, its ultimate authority over developmental resources to the GTA, and its control over the police apparatus? Was the GJM’s attempt to rule through “money” and “muscle” not successful, anymore? Were the defections an expression of *sachet jantā,* of citizens aware of their political rights and entitlements who checked on their leaders (see Chapter 1)?

Such concerns also lead to broader questions on a place for a “moral” politics free from material and transactional aspirations, the rule of “money” and “muscle power”, socio-economic dependence on patronage, clientelism, and longing for security. Can defections from the GJM be read as an end to the imposed silence?

Studies on political authority claim that even if a majority of the population recognises a leaders’ or party’s authority, there are always groups or individuals, who have a different opinion and challenge the authority and legitimacy of a ruler (Hardin 2009; Dogan 2009; Lentz 1998). The aim of this chapter is to explore such defections and open challenges to the authority of the GJM in more detail. More specifically, I display examples where the “silence” – or the public refrain to speak up against perceived injustices committed by the *Morcha* – is broken. I propose that such breaking of the

silence is a form of resistance. This includes all open attempts to challenge the GJM by not subjecting their own agency to the party's orders even if enforced through co-optation or repression. Understood in this way, resistance means the refusal to being bought or being intimidated. This not only includes practical but also ideological struggles in form of public propositions of alternative political programmes or forms of leadership. This broad definition refers to visible and "spectacular" (Scott 1989) forms of resistance "which pose a declared threat to powerholders", e.g. social movements, dissident sects, political opposition groups, and forms of open confrontation (ibid. 34)[176]. To analyse such forms of resistance this chapter switches the main focus from the time-span between 2007 and 2011 to the period after the GTA agreement (in July 2011) and the GTA establishment in August 2012.

Although the GJM neither attained Gorkhaland nor increased the territory of the autonomous council compared to the previous DGHC, it won the GTA elections nearly uncontested. Party president Bimal Gurung became the new *de jure* leader of a council of 50 councillors, amongst them 45 elected GJM councillors (nearly double as many as the number of councillors in the previous DGHC which was 28). Twenty-eight of them won their constituencies uncontested although they were not chosen amongst their respective regional party-workers but directly nominated by Bimal Gurung during a festive party-meeting at Gymkhana in Darjeeling town, which resembled the announcement of lottery-winners[177]. The remaining 17 constituencies were contested by the TMC, the State government party, which had begun to increase its activities in Darjeeling hills since 2012. Yet, nine days after the set date for withdrawing nominations Mamata Banerjee directed her followers not to contest[178]. The only real challenge to Gurung's authority was posed by the independent candidateship of a GJM leader from Kalimpong sub-division. Gurung dealt with him by threatening to refuse his membership in the GTA even if he won (Sarkar 2013, 164). Not surprisingly, the rebel lost. The procedures leading to the "election" of the GTA were dubious (i.e. the whole exercise was conducted under the authority of the West Bengal State government and not by the Indian Election Commission, which is regarded as a strict and independent body). However, its establishment eventually ended the informal working agreement between the (non-elected) GJM

[176] Scott (1989, 34) contrasted these with "every-day-forms of resistance" which happens in circumstances "in which open defiance is impossible or entails mortal danger".
[177] Initially, the TMC had submitted nominations for 18 constituencies, the CPI-M for 13, and 46 independent candidates filed nominations, too. However, 19 independent candidates were rejected, and by July 12, 40 candidates including 27 independents withdrew their nominations. The 13 CPI-M candidates withdrew their nominations claiming that they had been intimidated by the GJM. Thus the GJM won 28 seats of the 45 uncontested (Sarkar 2013, 157).
[178] Sarkar interprets this move to design "dummy-candidates" as strategy to maintain amicable relationships with the GJM, and concludes that the presence of TMC in the elections "hardly yielded anything for the return of 'substantial' democracy in the hills" (Sarkar 2013, 163).

and the DGHC (see Chapter 6). It legalised and formalised the GJM's resource monopoly over developmental funds.

Like the DGHC previously, the GTA is funded by the central and State government. It is build up from the *GTA sabhā* (council; consisting of 45 elected and 5 Governor appointed members, chairman, deputy chairman and 7 Ex-officio members), an executive body (chief executive, deputy chief executive, and 14 executive members, nominated by chief executive from amongst the 50 *sabhā*-members), and a principal secretary selected by the chief executive from amongst a list prepared by the State government.

Like the DGHC, the GTA does not have any legislative powers. In contrast to the DGHC, the GTA has more councillors/constituencies, less government nominated members, and was granted some more departments, including the *tauzi*-department, which deals with the land records of the tea plantations. Other important departments are education, agriculture, rural development, and unreserved forests. Further, the GTA was granted the administrative, executive, and financial powers over the transferred subjects. The council was also promised higher funding including central assistance of 200 crore INR (2000 million) yearly (for the first three years) (Sarkar 2012)[179]. The slow and incomplete transfer of all departments from the State administration to the GTA, however, caused regular conflicts between the GJM and the State government.

To answer the question of why the GJM's support based began to dwindle after the GTA establishment by displaying forms of resistance, I begin the discussion with a brief examination of the role of the media in Darjeeling as a platform for those, who break the silence. Literature on competitive authoritarianism identifies the media as a platform for the formation of opposition (Levitsky and Way 2002). Do they provide a space for voicing critique against the ruling party in Darjeeling? In how far are the media and journalists subject to repression? In Chapter 8.2.2 I turn to examples, where groups or individuals openly challenged or spoke up against the GJM. I begin with a display of alternative imaginations of ideal-pictures of leadership and politics as promoted by the AIGL, the CPRM, and the BGP, some of these embodied in the independent *Lok Sabha* candidateship of M.P. Lama in 2014. I suggest that although these ideals hardly succeeded in bringing about changes in political practice, they keep moral values in politics alive. In Chapters 8.2.3 to 8.2.6 I take a closer look at three opposition parties, the GNLF, the TMC, and the CPRM, each displaying distinct ways of resisting the *Morcha*, and I analyse why people chose to follow these minority outfits. While I identify the CPRM as an example of defying "money" power, I turn to the attempts by late Madan

[179] During the financial year 2012-13 the GTA received 550 million INR (from Core Plan sector); 328.4 million (from Rural Infrastructure Development Fund sector); 381.6 million INR (Special Central Assistance), and again 650 million INR (Additional Central Assistance) (Government of West Bengal 2013b, 51).

Tamang to hold a public meeting inspite of threats to his live as an example of defying “muscle power”. Lastly, I explore the example of ethnic associations, petitioning for scheduled tribe status and own developmental councils, as an alternative avenue to pose demands on the state outside of the realm of Gorkhaland.

I critically examine these examples as limits to the GJM’s strategies for ruling through reputation, repression, and patronage. I ask whether these do not only portray attempts of groups to provide alternatives to the GJM but also pose serious challenges to the party’s dominance.

8.2 Spaces for critique and forms of opposition

8.2.1 Media and *Facebook*

Media in competitive authoritarian systems are regarded as important “meeting platforms” for opposition parties and provide a means to criticise (Levitsky and Way 2002). But in how far do the media in Darjeeling provide a platform for critique at the ruling party? The major local newspaper is the Nepali-language *Himalaya Darpan*, which is published daily and available at all market places. There are two or three other vernacular newspapers but their geographical spread is less and they are often only available in bigger towns. Besides, the State-level English dailies *The Telegraph* and *The Statesman* are available and regularly report on major political developments in Darjeeling. There is also a range of internet-blogs including *Darjeelingtimes.com* (which contains an updated collection from newspaper articles on the region and opinion pages). Further, various *Facebook* groups contain updated news or opinions on Darjeeling politics. The discussion here only focuses on the vernacular newspapers (mainly *Himalaya Darpan*), the State-level *The Telegraph*, and *Facebook*[180]. A view on the mentioned media sources gives the impression that they indeed provide an important platform for the opposition. Critical statements by GJM’s rivals (opposition members and private persons) are regularly published, although mostly not on the front-page. None of the opposition leaders ever complained about a lack of representation in the print-media. Some rumours, however, hold that GJM activists sometimes try to stop people from reading critical accounts by buying newspapers in bulk. Yet, I could not cross-check such accusations. Although I got the impression that local newspapers were relatively uninfluenced by the GJM, in one instance I witnessed how a *Himalayan Darpan* journalist requested a GTA councillor to help his wife get a position as a teacher.

[180] I did not conduct a detailed media analysis of these and my statements are based on rather general observations as a regular reader of these media.

Picture 8: A poster reading “Sunrise in Darjeeling, Welcome Mamata Banerjee” welcomes the CM in Darjeeling town. The CM and GJM leader Bimal Gurung smile in front of the Kanchenjunga mountain. The friendliness did not prevail: in August the GJM switched back into its “movement”-mode and initiated its month-long agitation for Gorkhaland. Picture taken by author in June 2013.

Although the councillor politely refused to help him this incident left me puzzled about the independence of the concerned reporter. Further, upon my questions, another journalist claimed that he regularly received threats from GJM-workers, telling him to “take care” or “to be careful”, but he saw this as part of his job. The journalist coped with the situation by trying to write in a “balanced” way by giving coverage to all sides of stories.

The seemingly little intimidation to the print media from the GJM might stem from the fact that these hardly reach the rural areas, and are read by a faction of the population there, only. This renders them quite ineffective in terms of opinion-making of the masses. This is different with the local cable TV channels, which are run by private companies and are viewed by many people. These are mainly used by the GJM to disseminate news and interviews with leaders. They otherwise remain “unpolitical” but hardly ever report on rival parties’ activities. This is not surprising, as Bimal Gurung apparently went down heavily on five local cable TV channels of Kalimpong in February 2012, allegedly because they were broadcasting anti-GJM statements (KalimNews 2012). Gurung was accused of threatening the owner of the network by claiming that the stations were run illegally (ibid.). Gurung also criticised *Facebook*, which attained increasing importance as a forum for public critique at the GJM. While only a few newspapers reach the rural areas (usually when a jeep driver brings one upon request), the spread of smart phones allows many persons to easily access the internet. In the vernacular *Hamro Prajasakti* (30.8.2012) Gurung was cited:

> He said that the youth now did careless critical comments on *Facebook* instead of using it for good things. 'Nowadays our people do backbiting on Bimal Gurung [...]. This is completely bad work. [...] In such a situation lies are not welcome', he said.

Eventually, before the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections Gurung opened his official *Facebook* account and since then regularly posts news mainly on his political and developmental activities as elected GTA chief and about political meetings. Most of these posts are written in English (although Gurung is said to have difficulty in speaking English) and illustrated with pictures of the leader amongst the masses. It is striking that there are hardly any "critical" comments on his *Facebook* page and some believe that such comments are regularly deleted by a GJM editorial team. Despite such limitations I had the impression that – albeit not very prominently – critical reporting is done in Darjeeling and particularly *Facebook* and vernacular media provide an important platform to voice critique of the ruling party.

8.2.2 Ideal pictures of leadership and politics

A recurrent topic of rival parties' open critique of the *Morcha* concerns the question of "good" leadership. Often, rivals construct ideal images of leaders in contrast to Bimal Gurung. As discussed in Chapter 5, Bimal Gurung was increasingly criticised as he failed to live up to people's moral and material expectations. Although he invested in a reputation as a genuine, capable, and generous leader, he was increasingly perceived as selfish and dishonest about the statehood agenda. Such critique of the leader also provided an entrance point for rival parties to challenge him, resulting in a struggle over his reputation fought in the newspapers and occasional public meetings. But rivals do not only criticise Gurung, they also promote standards for "good" leadership. One of the prominent figures opposition leaders stylised as a "good" leader is late Madan Tamang. On May 21, 2012 at a public memorial meeting two years after his murder, organised by the AIGL and attended by representatives of the CPRM, BGP, CPI-M, and the Gorkha National Congress, speakers praised Tamang's qualities:

> Madan Tamang never lied. He never suppressed people, he was never unjust to anybody […]. Madan Tamang never taught to kill people, he did not teach to bulldoze any other party office. He never taught to conspire against any other party leader […]. He always did issue-based politics […]. He never compromised on any issue […]. Madan Tamang never did politics for the *chaukī* (post/chair, power). (Pratab Khatee, AIGL)

The speeches at the public meeting were sparked with references to "democracy" (*gaṇatantra*). Tara Muni Rai (CPRM) described Tamang as "responsible, honest, and thoughtful" leader, who died for "democracy" and "did not surrender", and continued: "We don't want a dictatorship here, everyone should get the right to expression and free decision […]. There should not be a supremacy of muscle. Everybody's voice should be heard." Another speaker added: "In a democracy I have to grasp the flag

which I like. In a democracy, I have to eat what I like, and wear what I like." Unanimously the speakers criticised the West Bengal government for not enforcing "law and order" in Darjeeling, alleging that "Darjeeling has a different law" from the rest of Bengal (speech, P. Khatee). Another speaker directly called upon CM Mamata Banerjee to "give a decent society, where there is the rule of law; where people walk freely."

Tamang himself had accused the (then CPI-M led) State government for allowing the GJM to disturb AIGL's attempted meeting. In his critique, Tamang also directly pointed at the problematic conflation of party politics and movement (see Chapter 1). Accusing the GJM leadership for "selling" the statehood demand and running after the money, he had demanded "collective leadership" to make sure that no leader can be "bought" by the State government to divert the Gorkhaland agitation (Tamang 2010, YouTube), a demand reiterated by Pratab Khatee at the public meeting. At the same time Tamang had demanded a more inclusive and transparent "movement" by pointing at the fact that it had been captured by political parties instead of being a "people's movement" (Tamang 2010, YouTube):

> This is not Ghisingh's movement (*āndolaṇ*), this is not Bimal Gurung's movement […]. This is the movement of all people living in the hills […]. All people have the right in that movement to know the truth […]. The movement should include all people's thoughts. (ibid.)

Similar leadership qualities were also demanded by the BGP. At an indoor-meeting in Darjeeling town in June 2013, BGP leader Munis Tamang demanded a new type of leadership to bring the statehood demand forward. Leaders should be "people-like-us" and have four qualities: they should be *svachha* (clean, pure, here: not a criminal), *shikṣit* (educated, aware), *shakchham* (able) and *shamarpit* (dedicated). Such leaders should be made centres of influence at different localities. Tamang saw them as a means to break the "*netā-jantā"* (leader-follower) model where people were treated "like a commodity", and added "we cannot do 'muscle' or 'money politics' but we can do *credible* politics [Engl]." Munis Tamang's elaborations were later published in *Himalaya Darpan*. Members of the GTF saw such values embodied in M.P. Lama, the former vice-chancellor of Sikkim University, whom they supported as independent candidate in the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections. Lama demanded development and statehood for Darjeeling/Dooars, while his DDUDF claimed to propose a non-political and more inclusive alternative to the established Darjeeling parties.

But although both the AIGL and BGP meetings underline moral images of "good" leaders as opposed to the defamed GJM-leaders, it is questionable whether they reach the masses or appeal to them. The AIGL meeting was attended by a few dozen people and the BGP's indoor-meeting was attended by about 16 people, most of them were elderly (and only two of them were women).

How applicable and attractive are such ideal pictures of leaders and leadership to the Darjeeling masses? Although many of these moral values certainly appeal to many persons (see Chapter 5), the question remains how many voters are independent and brave enough to actively defy the climate of silence and follow a leader whose authority is not based on money- and/or muscle-power, who cannot distribute resources or provide security if faced with threats for engaging in a rival party. Does “credible politics” as promoted by Munis Tamang have a space in Darjeeling? M.P. Lama was promoted as such a credible leader. Supported by the GTF, he garnered about 49,000 votes during the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections mostly from urban areas. He did not have a chance against the GJM (209,017 votes), and not even against the GNLF/TMC combine (86,271 votes). Whether his loss stems from a lack of organisational strength at the grassroots (his public appearances were concentrated on bazaar places along the main roads), lack of recognition amongst the majority of voters, or the little appeal of a leader lacking the means of money and muscle, remains an open question.

8.2.3 GNLF: Belief in the leader?

The growing dissatisfaction with the *Morcha* did not only become visible in public meetings of the AIGL or CPRM. After six years in political slumber suddenly the GNLF came back on stage. While the party’s foundation celebration in 2012 had been disturbed by the GJM (see Chapter 6), in 2013 units all over Darjeeling celebrated the day undisturbed. The party also began to reopen local units in the hills. Not even the clash at Soureni (see Chapter 7) in May 2013, could stop the GNLF from regaining ground. Surprisingly, not only old party followers, who had either joined the GJM in between or simply remained passively silent, engaged with the GNLF again, new and young members also joined the outfit.

I attended an indoor-meeting of a recently established local GNLF branch at Joubari* tea estate. The six mainly elder men gave me a leaflet on the 6th Schedule, which outlined the advantages of making Darjeeling “tribal”. They then engaged in a discussion on the need to attain Gorkhaland (via the 6th Schedule) and a general critique at the *Morcha* for killing educated persons such as Madan Tamang and the rule through fear, all together stressing the need for change. One activist recalled what Ghisingh had told them: “Tomorrow, ‘politics’ [Engl.] must not be the same. There need to be new faces, new thoughts. It needs not start from the head but from the grassroots.” Another added “only after the 6th Schedule is attained we will start ‘politics’ and engage in different parties. But before you play football you need to build a ground.”

I wondered, in how far this would bring a change in the way politics was done in Darjeeling. What became clear though was the unbroken belief and trust in Ghisingh as their leader, an observation, which I had made several times when conversing with GNLF followers, even if I confronted them with

allegations of his corruption and repression. Then the men began discussing how they could best implement Subash Ghisingh’s call to build “Village Protection Cells” (VPC) in their place. The GNLF had already called for an establishment of such cells in January 2011, but it only received a stronger response in 2013 (*TT*, 8.1.2011, *TT*, 11.6.2013). According to the activists, the VPC’s functions were to stop “bad activities in the village and to bring change”, to provide security for the *samāj* and the local GNLF leaders or to help in case of natural disasters. The VPC activists (men between 19 and 35 years) should not carry weapons like *khukurīs* but only be equipped with rods (one man added: “The police does not arrest you, if you carry a three-feet long rod”). Further, they stressed that members of the VPCs should be conscious, convinced of the GNLF, and they should not be alcoholics or gamblers. The VPCs should carry out all activities as “social work” and not for financial remuneration. One man, however, added that the VPCs were similar to the “village police”, which formed part of the 6th Schedule. Did this fuel hope amongst activists to become police men if the 6th Schedule was established? I did not come to know whether the VPC was eventually established in that village but briefly after the meeting, the GNLF succeeded in holding a public meeting close to Kurseong despite attempts by the GJM to disturb it. Accounts hold that the GNLF had brought its own force of rods-wielding young men, creating its own “muscle”.

At that time, party president Subash Ghisingh was still in exile in the plains. After 2008, he had only returned to Darjeeling ahead of the 2011 West Bengal Assembly elections. For four weeks he held electoral rallies also in Darjeeling town under the protection of the electoral code of conduct. After a violent clash between GNLF and GJM followers, which left one GJM supporter dead and burnt down houses of some GNLF followers, Ghisingh returned to his exile the same night (*TT*, 17.5.2011; *ToI*, 17.5.2011). But prior to the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections the situation had changed and political spaces in the hills were opening up. This was signalled by Bimal Gurung’s public “invitation” to Ghisingh by the end of 2013. Some believe that being confronted with his dwindling support base and lack of ability to stop Ghisingh from returning, Gurung simply tried to “save his face” (Chattopadhyay 2014). Eventually, in March 2014, Ghisingh returned to his house in Darjeeling town. Observed by the media, an obviously weak and aged party-president stood on the balcony to greet the few hundred followers, which had gathered. The large public meeting ahead of the elections at Darjeeling Chowk Bazaar (which was attended by Ghisingh) signalled that the green flags were ultimately back in the hills (*ToI*, 11.4.2014). Significantly, the GNLF entered into an alliance with the TMC for the *Lok Sabha* elections; Ghisingh himself did not go to cast his vote officially due to health reasons. The *Morcha* was neither able to stop Ghisingh from reclaiming his old home nor to oust him after the elections. It

remains an open question, however, what the GNLF will do once its aged leader Ghisingh as the central figure keeping the organisation together is not able to lead the party anymore[181].

8.2.4 TMC: "Bargaining politics"?

Chapter 6 underlined that the establishment of "resource monopolies" and the associated regular distribution of benefits through the party sustained its mobilising function. At the same time, it lead to a harsh inner-party competition about the scarce funds and to what a *sabhashād* called a "bargaining politics" (Chapter 6). This seems to have increased after the establishment of the GTA where the 47 GJM *sabhashāds* struggle for the party president's (alias GTA chief's) favour to get projects sanctioned for their constituencies. This section attempts to explain the defections to the TMC with reference to Karateke's (2005) concept of supply and demand sites of legitimacy (as introduced in Chapter 1). If leaders cannot supply what followers demand the latter are prone to switch their political affiliation. This is exacerbated by inner-party competition for scarce resources. I illustrate this proposal along two examples.

The leaders' problems to live up to their followers' demands became apparent in June 2013, when I accompanied Pravesh* – a GTA councillor, who was struggling with upcoming TMC units in his constituency – to two meetings with GJM defectors. The groups of around 15 to 20 mostly young men voiced concerns about the distribution of developmental benefits. While the councillor was stressing on what he had already done for the constituency, including road constructions and placed emphasis on achieving community benefits (as opposed to individual benefits), one defector angrily asked the councillor: "What does the GTA give to *us*?" Others expressed their dissatisfaction with the work of the GJM affiliated tea workers' union or for not receiving news on party-activities. Such accounts expressed their dissatisfaction particularly after the establishment of the GTA. They felt they did not get what they had expected despite their year-long engagement for the Gorkhaland movement. Their critique suggests that their participation in the movement itself might have been motivated by the expectation of individual rewards through the GJM. The councillor then promised to organise more developmental schemes or to invite Bimal Gurung to visit the place (following the popular coinage "where the president goes development comes") but stressed that he needed their support to do so. Two days later, one of the GJM defector groups had removed the TMC flags and re-joined the GJM, suggesting that their "bargaining politics" (as Pravesh called it) had been successful. The other flags, however, remained.

[181] Postscriptum: Ghisingh died in January 2015, after a prolonged sickness. His son, Man Ghising, who till date had not been active in politics, became the new party president probably to avoid infighting amongst aspirant leaders.

In 2013, also some of my friends from Bagargaun, who had previously supported the GJM had joined the TMC. For them, a major reason to join the ruling party in West Bengal was their perceived blatant corruption of local leaders and the inaction of the sub-divisional committee to stop this. My friend proudly emphasised his close relations to Darjeeling TMC leader Rajen Mukhia. In the TMC he saw an able provider of development, e.g. via the North Bengal Development Department[182]. This institution has the official objectives to "promote social, economic and cultural advancement" of six northern districts in West Bengal (including Darjeeling). It runs under the authority of the State Development and Planning Department and has the power to issue developmental contracts and schemes outside the purview of the GTA (Government of West Bengal 2015). My friend was also hoping to open a ration shop. "Rajen Mukhia has the phone number of Mamata Banerjee and can call her every time", he exclaimed. Instead of going through the GTA/GJM route, he thought that membership in the TMC provided him with a direct link to the State government. He also claimed that the police was now stricter and would listen to TMC members instead of the *Morcha*. "Those officers who don't follow the TMC's directives are transferred", he explained, "Mamata Banerjee has made it very 'tight' for the *Morcha*, now". Upon my question whether he did not want to have Gorkhaland anymore, he claimed: "Everybody wants Gorkhaland. But right now I do not see a way for it to come." He had lost the belief in Gorkhaland, and instead had decided to "take some benefits from politics" now.

Also some former GNLF members joined the TMC. One of them clearly named security-reasons for his decision as a member of the West Bengal ruling party would be better protected from the *Morcha'*s violent repression.

Such accounts suggest that decisions to join the TMC were not based on any political programme or ideology. For many it was simply a tactic to exercise pressure on the GJM to deliver what they believed was their fair share of the party's perceived wealth. Others expressed their believe that in the long term an affiliation with TMC would allow them access to non-GTA-channelled state benefits, or receiving police protection to tackle anticipated or actual GJM attacks.

Defections express not only a decline in the perceived ability of the GJM to "deliver", including "development" (or contracts) and Gorkhaland but also perceived inequalities between wealthy (and "selfish") leaders and "poor" (and exploited) masses. The TMC's slogan of "democracy, peace and development" provides a smart label for such dissatisfaction. Not surprisingly the struggle over political authority in Darjeeling is increasingly fought as a struggle over developmental schemes in the rhetoric of alleged corruption. TMC members, for instance, regularly engage in campaigns claiming more transparency in the implementation of welfare schemes (including the NREGS). Such

[182] Prior to 2011, it was known as the "Uttar Bangla Unnayan Parshad".

campaigns include visits to the Block Development Officers or the filing of Right to Information requests, which is usually covered in the media. This combined with perceived attempts of the government to make the district and block-administrations more accountable, especially before the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections. During her visits to Darjeeling, CM Mamata Banerjee regularly proclaimed her intent to make a “Switzerland” out of Darjeeling, underlining a developmental agenda, which has so far, however, only focussed on tourism while ignoring the major concerns of the tea economy (see Chapter 4).

Such attempts to establish the TMC can be regarded as a step to make the State government a direct contact point for project applications and clearly challenges the GJM’s resource monopoly over developmental funds. The State government needs local TMC units as a means to check on the GJM and is, therefore, willing to distribute resources. Thus, joining the TMC puts individuals into a position to bargain with the GJM and the State-ruling government at the same time. As an effect, party affiliations become more fluid and leaders cannot be sure about electoral support anymore.

Thus, once the belief in the leader’s capacity to deliver vanishes, the widespread party follower networks constituting “transactional groups” (Bailey 1969, 75) weaken, which ultimately results in a loss of the leader’s power and control. This supports a finding of Hachhetu (2008) on the limits of patronage to sustain a political party. Instead of strengthening a leader’s authority, “[t]he more a party depends on money [...] and patronage, the less is the party’s capacity to mobilise the mass of the people” (ibid. 172), resulting in a loss of the leaders’ capability to capture the state in the longer term. In Darjeeling, the perceived non-delivery of leaders according to followers’ demands resulted in a loss of the leaders’ factual legitimacy. The decline of the GJM’s margin in the 2014 elections might be a result of this, too[183]. Although such defections do not pose a general critique of the means of “money” and “muscle”, there are a few instances, where individuals resisted being bought or intimidated. I discuss these in the next two sub-sections.

8.2.5 CPRM: Defying “money” power?

The discussion above suggests that political mobilisation in Darjeeling is not possible without “money”-power and distribution of resources through clientelist networks. As argued in Chapter 6, Magaloni and Kricheli’s (2010) account on dominant-party regimes suggests that only those parties commanding resources are able to organise mass-support. Greene (2010) claimed that “resource monopolies sustain political monopolies” (ibid. 808). Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) contend that programmatic or ideological bases of support to parties are only feasible for persons with secure economic positions.

[183] I elaborated on the same argument in Wenner (2014).

However, two examples of CPRM activities suggest that also a party lacking the means of money is able to mobilise active support. The first example is the party's successful celebration of the *May Diwas* (May-day) on May 1, 2012 in Darjeeling town. The meeting was held at Darjeeling Chowk Bazaar and succeeded despite of attempts of the GJM to spoil it and to capture the venue for their own party-meeting. This event merits closer attention:

Chowk Bazaar at the main road and the central bazaar area of Darjeeling town has been the site for political meetings and public speeches since the colonial time. Previously known as Gundri Bazaar (strawmats' market), at weekends vendors (including vegetable sellers from the rural areas) attracted people from urban and rural areas, who provided speakers a considerable audience. The visitors then carried the news back to their respective places. The designation Gitange Dada for the speakers' place (literally: "Singers' hill") stems from that time, and today refers to the broad balcony at the municipal building, where speakers hold their speeches. Ghisingh later changed the name to Sumeru Manchh but most people in Darjeeling still know it as Gitange Dada. Opposite to the balcony, is the *postering bhittā* (poster-wall) which displays messages of political parties and other groups (Picture 4 in Chapter 5.2). Any kind of political agitation is announced here, which – according to journalists – makes it an important information board. Given the central location of the wall, messages from here not only easily spread in town but travellers from the passing passenger vehicles further disseminate the news to the whole district.

The centrality of both, the *postering bhittā* and Gitange Dada make the place a much contested site amongst political parties. Opposition parties criticise not only that their posters were regularly torn from the wall by GJM activists but also that their meetings were disturbed or hindered. Against this backdrop, it is remarkable that the CPRM managed to enforce its official permission to use the site for the May Day rally despite attempts of the *Morcha* activists to spoil it.

The GJM affiliated JUSLU union[184] called a strike in Darjeeling for all shops to remain closed (a CPRM member interpreted this as an attempt to stop people from going to the bazaar for shopping and accidentally listen to what the CPRM was saying). CPRM activists told me that when they began preparing the venue, in the morning of 1st May, by placing flags and posters, activists of the GJM had begun to post their own flags, too. When I reached the venue at around 9 am, a few hours before the meeting was to start and the bulk of the CPRM activists were to arrive, the atmosphere was tense. One acquainted journalist warned me of the probability of a "clash", while pointing at the 50 or so men lined up on each side of the street. "Over there are the GJM supporters, on the other side the CPRM men." I also spotted two GJM jeeps loaded with young men. Some police was on the road, too,

[184] Janmukti Unorganised Sector Labour Union

waiting as it seemed. On the balcony of another municipality building close to Gitange Dada, a well-known *Nari Morcha* activist sat with her arms folded and with an angry expression on her face. Not sure whether the meeting would take place I left towards the train station, where the demonstration was scheduled to start. And indeed, shouting slogans for the revolution and equipped with posters claiming Gorkhaland, what seemed like thousands of activists, ascended the winding road. When they reached Chowk Bazaar the GJM activists were gone, only leaving their flags behind, strategically placed between the red CPRM ones. The CPRM activists did not bother to remove them, saying that they were not using the same "methods" like the GJM. And so it happened that around 5,000 (*TT*, 3.1.2012) communists sang "The workers of the world are united" (*duṇiyāko majdur ektā ho*) underneath both, GJM and CPRM flags.

But while the class/tea-labour questions figured only in the initial speeches of the meeting, the agenda soon focussed on Gorkhaland and a more general critique at the GJM's leaders. This included allegations of their exploitation of people's emotions and the Gorkhaland issue for personal privileges, expressed in the idiom of "eating" and "becoming fatter and fatter" (speech, Govind Chettri; see Chapter 6). Enos Das Pradhan (BGP) opposed the GJM by asking people to fight their "fear-psychosis", and continued:

> We don't need a Gorkhaland amidst such a state of terror, we don't need a corrupted Gorkhaland. [...] We have the aim to restructure our society, to free it from terror, to liberate it from corruption. We need to create an environment which makes society move more freely, and it will be a civilised and well-off Gorkhaland.

Such proclamations not only complement above cited accounts on ideal leaders but also fill the idea of "Gorkhaland" with meaning. They exemplify one rare incidence, where leaders transcend the rhetoric of the ethno-regional "homeland" and indicate what *kind of* Gorkhaland they actually want.

The meeting continued till late afternoon. Later, when I asked one CPRM leader how they had managed to capture the venue she pointed at the big number of activists, who had simply outnumbered the GJM. Significantly, the CPRM's claim to the venue had also been supported by its own voluntary force, the *Swayam Sevak Bahini,* consisting of young male and female activists[185].

Realising that there might be a clash also the municipality administration had upheld their permission for the meeting and told the GJM to leave. After the CPRM had succeeded with holding the first massive public meeting since the GJM had attained power in 2007 (*TT*, 3.5.2012), the Gitange Dada

[185] Some compare this outfit to the GLP. But unlike the GJM's outfit the *Swayam Sevak Bahini* does not receive any payment or military training (*TT*, 8.1.2011).

was frequented by other groups and parties too, including the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA), the TMC, and even the CPI-M.

The second example of CPRM’s resistance shows how activists defied attempts of Bimal Gurung to lure them into his party by distributing benefits and resources. After the CPRM’s successful *May Diwas*, in June 2012 Gurung had decided to pitch his tents in the Rangmook/Cedars tea estate close to the town Sonada. The tea estate is home to CPRM president R.B. Rai, who lives in the village of Chandramandhura and is considered part of the “red belt” of Darjeeling, where the communist parties still have a certain hold and are even majority in some villages. Accompanied by some GLP activists and his personal bodyguards (equipped with AK-47 rifles) Gurung – who resided in the managers’ bungalow – distributed money to selected persons (usually recommended by the local party leaders), promised to construct houses for the poor, roads to connect remote villages, and community halls in the various villages that he visited.

But despite his large entourage he did not manage to visit Chandramandhura considered as the heart of CPRM in Darjeeling. Local CPRM activists had posted guards to avoid any “attack” on their base. Although there was no open confrontation, the battle over political support was fought in the local newspapers that closely covered Bimal Gurung’s stay. Reports of his benevolent activities and CPRM defections were followed by CPRM’s complaints about the allegedly “undemocratic” (*agaṇatantrik*) and politicised developmental practices of the GJM’s president who at that time was neither elected as DGHC representative nor of any other governmental department. When Bimal Gurung initiated a road construction, the CPRM complained about the destruction of thousands of tea-bushes due to the road widening; when Bimal Gurung arranged for rice-distribution to families, the CPRM complained about the shadowy sources of the rice (they said it was rice meant for government ration shops); when Bimal Gurung promised a community hall, the CPRM claimed it was constructed in a geologically sinking zone; and when Bimal Gurung organised an eye-camp for the population, the CPRM blamed them for forcing people to join the GJM in order to receive treatment. But CPRM delegations and complains to the BDO and the District Magistrate did not stop Bimal Gurung from continuing with his developmental welfare programme for the – as he called them – “politically oppressed people” of Rangmuk. He utilised this campaign to invest in his reputation as a capable social worker, who liberated and helped the deprived people of the region while simultaneously defaming the local CPRM leadership as rich exploiters opposed to any kind of development (Bimal Gurung, speech, 14.6.2012; see also Chapter 5). Eventually, after two weeks, Bimal Gurung left.

I was eager to learn how his attempts and distributions were perceived by the rural population, which – like people on other plantations – was surviving on meagre salaries from plantation work

and occasional jobs or engagement in government schemes. How did people react to Gurung’s promises and performance?

When I visited the tea estate it became apparent that Gurung had not only left behind promises of road widening, house construction, and community halls but also an upset and deeply divided local population. When I discussed Gurung’s visit with a group of female labourers, they exchanged heated arguments about the “rights” and “wrongs” of his conduct, and GJM supporters blamed the CPRM supporters for not allowing Gurung entrance to their village so that they went empty despite his campaign.

Indeed, some CPRM members had defected to the GJM, suggesting that they decided to follow the party which was able to provide them with money and services, such as house construction or medical expenses, while the CPRM did not provide employment or anything else. One elderly woman amongst the defectors stressed:

> We don’t have work, we don’t have money. We stayed with the CPRM for many years but didn’t get any employment. How long shall we wait? [Bimal Gurung] came and gave foot ration, a roof, and 3,000 rupees. Now we hope that he will organise a small job for us, too.

When I asked her why she had stayed with the CPRM so long, she pointed at their majority in the village, saying: “All the houses around are with the CPRM. Why should we protest (*birod garnū*)?”

Yet, while some welcomed Bimal Gurung’s initiative and praised him for supporting them with money (he gave 3,000 INR to some families and promised them a new house), organising a health camp and bringing development to the region, and thus perceived him as a leader, who cares for the poor and those in need, others refrained from taking material benefits. For instance, one elderly woman abstained from a free eye operation after she was asked to join the GJM and many did not approach Gurung to ask for a share of the free distribution of rice.

What can explain this refusal, i.e. that not everybody accepted Gurung’s offers although according to theory a poor economic background makes people prone to do so (see Chapter 6)? Why should people stay with a “poor” party, instead? Certainly, the fact that CPRM president R.B. Rai himself stems from Chandramandhura and the place’s long history as communist stronghold, explain part of its immunity against the GJM’s spoils. It makes also sense to believe that the ideological class and labour agenda, which is promoted in the cadre-based party helps sustaining its base. Unlike in the GJM, membership in the CPRM is more formalised and cadres pass through a more institutionalised programme of ideological lessons on communist ideology. Only those with longer-term political experience are promoted within the party hierarchy. Often, the fathers and forefathers of activists had been members of the communist party.

Some of the local followers also regularly underlined their aspirations for democracy (*gaṇatantra*), which for them meant the freedom to join the party of one’s own preference and the possibility to hold public meetings. Many of them unmasked Gurung’s proclaimed “welfare” activities as a strategy for gaining political support for the coming GTA elections in July 2012. Outrageous local activists did not only blame him for attempting to destroy their communist base in the hills but also for his lack of legitimacy to initiate any kind of “development” as he was not an elected representative (i.e. of the DGHC, see Chapter 6) and for ignoring local needs. They also blamed him for spoiling local women by calling them for dance evenings and for preparing food for his activists, adding to his reputation of having a weakness for the other gender. They believed that the GJM’s patronage eventually resulted in the demise of the statehood demand and despised Bimal Gurung as a broker (*dalāl*) of the West Bengal government, who “sold the soil” for personal gain. In this context, some even claimed that they did not want “development” – but only Gorkhaland. Such critique was contrasted with their own leader R.B. Rai, whom they praised for his moral integrity and decency. CPRM activists claimed they would sacrifice material benefits and “development” to forward the struggle for their “identity” embodied in Gorkhaland. In this way the myth of the “identity crisis” (which can only be addressed by Gorkhaland) became a reference frame to justify staying with a poor party.

Such accounts suggest that some CPRM activists form a different “moral community” (cf. Lentz 1998; see Chapter 1.3.1), exemplifying not only a different moral base for evaluating leaders’ conduct but also living according to such principles. While many scholars promote what Spencer called an “instrumental version of local politics” (Spencer 2007, 136) (where people are solely guided by materialist aspirations in return for their support) the fact that people of a socio-economic background similar to the GJM activists’ chose to support “poor” parties suggests that there are factors outside the realm of economic gain influencing their choice. This is not only their feeling that the form of GJM’s political patronage and corruption are ethically objectionable activities but mainly their trust in their respective leaders as genuine promoters of Gorkhaland.

When I revisited the site one year later, the tension had vanished. The proposed “two-lane” road was constructed rather as a “one-and-a-half” lane road, having many potholes and being covered by mud due to lack of protection walls at its side. Apparently, a local GJM leader had been given the contract for house-construction. But most of those whom Bimal Gurung had promised houses were still waiting for their construction, and the few that got houses under the scheme for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) had to accept smaller ones than what was promised. Despite the community halls, which were under construction, not much of Bimal Gurung’s visit seemed to have endured except for the affirmation that any kind of development was in his (and only his) hands. A rumour had it that the man, who had organised a jeep of young women for a dance evening during Gurung’s

stay, got a position as teacher in a government school. Due to the road "broadening" some thousand tea bushes had been destroyed. Meanwhile, the red flags were still flying over Chandramandhura. The politics of "money" and "muscle" had apparently failed to capture the whole place.

But inspite of such forms of resistance, the CPRM's inability to expand its base and to benefit from the growing resentment against the GJM makes it appear like a tiger without teeth. This is because many people still hold the previous members of the CPI-M responsible for the violence in *chhyāsī* ('86) and the failure to attain Gorkhaland, which places a stigma on today's CPRM. Further, instead of openly and directly opposing the GJM in their respective villages (where the CPRM is usually in minority), their protest was solely directed at the administration, mainly BDOs, where they complained about perceived corruption in the implementation of local schemes. This made the effectiveness of their resistance dependent on the decisions of the district administration[186]. Upon my question why they were not more active in their respective villages, usually local followers referred to the party's strategy of "wait and watch". They were hoping that those dissatisfied with the GJM's way of ruling would join their party on their own initiative. The lack of active and more open attempts to recruit new followers ultimately makes the CPRM a stagnant party and those dissatisfied with the GJM rather joined the GNLF or the TMC.

8.2.6 "He didn't run". Resistance against intimidation?

While the above examples concerned collective attempts of resistance, the case of Madan Tamang presents the highly visible struggle of an individual, who refused to be intimidated, and the spontaneous and forceful public reaction beyond party-political lines after his assassination. The brutal murder of AIGL president Madan Tamang in May 2010 belongs unquestionably to the most shocking incidents of political violence of the last decade in Darjeeling. Despite several attempts of the *Morcha* to hinder the scheduled AIGL's foundation day celebration at Chowk Bazaar, Tamang had defied threats and instead begun with preparations to the AIGL's meeting at Club Site, close to the Planters' Club and the Chowrasta in Darjeeling town. In an interview recorded briefly before, and which was published on YouTube after his death, he had said: "They attempt to frighten Madan Tamang […]. One has to go one day. Others die drinking *raksi* (local liquor). But don't try to frighten me. You cannot frighten me" (Tamang 2010, YouTube). In an interview, Bharati Tamang, his wife, recalled the events of May 21, 2010:

[186] In one instance local CPRM followers had applied for supervisor posts in the NREGS to a *gram panchayat* secretary. Saying that the GJM was in majority, however, he refused to grant them a position, making their attempts futile. When they complained to the BDO once about misallocation of earthquake help to households, however, the BDO initiated a re-survey. This indicates that the effectiveness of such resistance is very much dependent on the respective administrators' decisions and actions.

> He left the house early to prepare the venue at Club Site, putting tables, banners, chairs. He did not even wake me up. […] Around 9.30 am about 300 GJM followers carrying weapons came from Chowrasta. […] The police saw them and ran away. He [Madan Tamang] was alone but he didn't run. Instead he faced them, wanted to remind them. […] Everybody ran away out of fear but he didn't run. (interview, 11.6.2013)

Eventually, one man took out a long, sharp sword and cut him. Tamang might simply have underestimated the whole situation and the threats. But his murder carries lots of symbolism not only for the reign of muscle and the brutality of the killing. It can also be seen as a sign of active resistance and sovereignty. Hansen and Stepputat's (2006) take on sovereignty, defined as the "ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity" (ibid. 296) regards the authority over the own body as a way to resist the power of the sovereign[187]. Certain uses of the body, e.g. in hunger-strikes or civil disobedience, where humans willingly submit their own bodies to be damaged or beaten, render "state power (or non-state sovereigns) both excessively brutal and strangely impotent at the same time" (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 13). The human body becomes the "site upon which sovereign violence [...] inscribes itself and encounters the most stubborn resistance" (ibid. 11).

Seen from this perspective, maybe it was in this last moment when Madan Tamang did not run away that he defended the authority over his own body, sacrificing it instead of giving in to the threat to his life. He allowed the attackers to take his life but in doing so maintained the power to decide on his own fate and his commitment, the conviction that what he was doing was right. Maybe he hoped that his cause would live on, that his death would not go in vein. Interpreted in this way, it was in the moment when he did not run that he stated his autonomy as a person refusing to be intimidated by those who claim power over others and their bodies. An amateur video taken by a tourist from a hotel above Club Site shows the scene after the assassination (philippe freedive 2010, Youtube). The lifeless body of Tamang lies alone on the asphalt in a sea of dark-red blood. Eventually, a few persons run to attend him and put him into a car, which brings him to the nearest hospital. But it was already too late to save his life.

The news of the gruesome murder spread fast and within an hour all vendors in Darjeeling had shut down their shops and restaurants in protest against the killing. An NDTV (national news channel) reporter described the atmosphere as tense. People were scared, the town deserted except for some "unidentifiable groups" which gathered carrying *khukurīs.* The West Bengal Police Inspector General, NDTV, and other national news channels identified GJM activists as the culprits (*Himalayan Darpan*, 22.5.2010).

[187] In this reading the GJM enjoys some sovereignty in Darjeeling as the party's forms of punishment of rivals usually went unnoticed by the State government, which holds the legal authority over law and order, and the police in Darjeeling, which only occasionally enforces its power. Thus, the GJM's sovereignty is ultimately subject to the State government.

The funeral procession, which was attended by an estimated 15,000 persons two days later, saw an unforeseen outbreak of anger amongst the town population. Footage shows thousands of people gathering in the rain, shouting slogans against Bimal Gurung and the GJM. Cheered by others, some even tore down flags and posters of the GJM and its president. Flanked by armed CRPF and police personnel, the vehicle carrying the dead body of Tamang slowly drove through the streets, full with white Bhuddist *khadas* people placed on it as a sign of respect. It was the first time after the GJM’s establishment that people openly shouted slogans against the GJM, something unthinkable three days earlier. A person interviewed by a TV channel describes Tamang’s murder as the “death of democracy” in Darjeeling, adding that “more than Gorkhaland, I feel democracy is important”. In an interview with me later, a journalist recalled:

> There was a huge public uproar. […] I could feel that for the first time the people of Darjeeling were really speaking because they understood a particular situation. They were protesting a brutal killing which people didn’t like. So that was the only situation when I felt that people spontaneously came out with what they felt […]. When he was killed that was the only time this society did what it has to do: to work independently as a society. (interview, 2012).

Similarly, an intellectual claimed that the “outrage was large enough to toughen people’s consciousness and make human beings out of them”, but then added: “But most of them are kind of frozen in a stasis where self-preservation and pragmatism rules.”

Due to the tense atmosphere in Darjeeling, Bimal Gurung, who had been in Kalimpong, could only return under police protection. But outrage did not only threaten the GJM. Eleven top-leaders of the party, including three central committee members resigned, amongst them were intellectuals, who had been instrumental in framing the course of the party towards Delhi and Kolkata.

One week later, Bimal Gurung organised a massive public meeting at North Point College, at the northern fringe of Darjeeling town, close to his home-base Tukvar/Singmari. At the meeting, which was also attended by BJP’s Member of Parliament from Darjeeling, Jaswant Singh, he reinstated his authority by underlining his dedication to Gorkhaland. He also threatened those, who dared to play with the “fire of Gorkhaland, the GJM” and defamed leaders of the CPRM (see Chapter 5). Things calmed down, and the GJM continued to rule. The murder accused Nicole Tamang escaped mysteriously from the CID (Crime Investigation Department, on State level) custody; from the other 30 persons named on the charge-sheet most remained on the wanted-list for years. Only in February 2013 five of the accused were arrested; another 18 surrendered between June and September 2013 (*TT*, 18.6.2013; *The Statesman*, 6.9.2013) (see Chapter 7).

Madan Tamang's murder, however, has left a deep scarce on the psyche of already frightened citizens. Despite the huge spontaneous outcry, which might have brought Bimal Gurung to fall, it seems hardly anybody else was willing to risk standing alone against the superiority of the GJM and to risk his or her life. But inspite of the fear, the spontaneous outrage underlines that aspirations for freedom of opinion and for non-violence persist, even if secretly and hardly ever voiced in the open.

8.2.7 The tribal revival. Alternative avenues to the state?[188]

I described membership in the TMC and GNLF as attempts to negotiate the relation to the state directly, without the GJM as a "representative" in between. Besides such party-political moves, however, a second alternative to establish a direct contact to the state comes in form of demands for recognition as scheduled tribes (ST) in India (see Chapter 3.5.3 on the advantages of this status).

Middleton (2010) has described demands for ST recognition in Darjeeling during Ghisingh's reign in detail and discussed them in relation to the Gorkhaland demand. What is remarkable about this tribal avenue is that it happens not only outside the demand of Gorkhaland but even involves an "undoing of the Gorkhas" (Middleton 2013a, 18), the very identity, which forms one main aspect of the "homeland" dream (see Chapter 4). He identifies a first move towards this tribal recognition after the failure of the GNLF's Gorkhaland movement. In this wake, he argues, "many of the individual ethnicities that comprised the composite Gorkha community began exploring alternative routes to rights and recognition in the nation-state" (Middleton 2013b, 15). The Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa, and Yolmo are already recognised as tribal groups since the 1950s. In the 1990s the Tamang and Limbus followed, and also Gurungs and Rais filed applications. This "tribal turn" (Middleton 2013b, 14) was intensified by Ghisingh's 6th Schedule plan, which was feared to privilege tribal groups over others (see Chapter 3). This resulted in intensified applications and programmes of tribal associations to prove that groups qualified as tribals according to the government's regulations (Middleton 2010). While Tamangs and Limbus were recognised as tribals in 2003, the others' applications are still pending. Such demands for ST status were according to Middleton not only motivated by expected affirmative action benefits but also by the "symbolic inclusion [...] into the imagined community of India" (Middleton 2013a, 15) by becoming scheduled tribes *of India.* This suggests that claiming ST status became another means (outside the rhetoric of Gorkhaland) to address the "identity crisis". With the rise of the GJM, the scrapping of the 6th Schedule, and the revival of the Gorkhaland movement since 2007, however, the appeal of ST recognition dwindled and "the terms of identity soon switched back to that of 'Gorkhas'" (ibid.).

[188] In writing this section, I am grateful for comments by Townsend Middleton and Jenny Bentley, who is currently working on her dissertation on the Lepcha of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and eastern Nepal.

I want to complement Middleton’s account with my own observations on the tribal revival under the current GJM rule by focussing on its effects on the access to developmental resources. After the GJM’s agreement on the GTA and the perceived decline in the Gorkhaland agenda, tribal ethnic associations again gained ground in Darjeeling and intensified their demand for ST-recognition. This became not only apparent in regular public meetings (especially the Rai-association was active) but also through spatial markers such as flags. During my last two visits to Darjeeling in 2013 and September 2014, a significant number of houses of the Rai were carrying the yellow flag of the Rai association, displaying bow and arrow as sign for their identity.

At the same time, those who already held ST-status increased their demands for direct developmental support through the State government. Two associations, the All India Tamang Buddhist Association (AIBTA), and the Indigenous Tribal Lepcha Association (ILTA) (as part of the broader Lepcha Rights’ Movement) with headquarters in Kalimpong succeeded with their demands to get their own developmental boards. This development can be contextualised with a view on the deteriorating relations between the GJM and the West Bengal Chief Minister.

At a public function in Darjeeling town on 29th January 2013 it came to a fall-out between between the Chief Minister Banerjee and the GJM. While the Chief Minister addressed the crowd and reiterated that Darjeeling was a part of West Bengal, GJM supporters began shouting slogans in favour of Gorkhaland. Bimal Gurung’s attempts to appease the crowd failed and the angry Chief Minister announced that she can be “rough and tough” (*TT*, 30.1.2013).

Briefly after this in February 2013, much to the annoyance of the GJM, the West Bengal government passed the bill to establish the “Mayel Lyang Lepcha Developmental Board” (MLLDB) under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act (1961). Although the board provides a non-territorial form of affirmative action politics, the spatial-territorial reference to the ancient Lepcha kingdom “Mayel Lyang” stated the Lepcha’s claim to indigenousness and gave their apprehensions to being included in the “Gorkha” category an institutional expression (see Chapter 4). Besides protecting and promoting “the Lepcha language, tradition and culture” the Board is also entitled to take up “social welfare-activities” (Government of West Bengal 2013a, 1). The members of the Board are, however, not elected but instead nominated by the State government based on the “recommendation of the largest recognised society or organisation of the Lepcha community of West Bengal” (ibid. 2), making the ILTA the *de facto* head of the Board in cooperation with the State government. The MLLDB receives its funding directly from the Backward Classes Welfare Department of the West Bengal State.

Generally, the GJM had expressed its support towards the establishment of such councils as long as they came under the purview of the GTA. But the decision to make the ILTA administratively and financially independent from the GTA led to increasing tensions between the GJM and the ILTA (Jenny Bentley, personal communication). To oppose the funding of the Board outside the purview of the GTA the *Morcha* had even called a *bandh* to stop the Lepcha from celebrating the CM's announcement in February 2013. Only after a hunger-strike of the Lepcha that lasted six days, the West Bengal government passed the resolution. Significantly the bill was implemented in August 2013 during the *Morcha*'s reinitiated Gorkhaland movement. After the central government had announced the creation of a Telangana State to be carved out of Andhra Pradesh in July 2013, the GJM had revived its agitation for Gorkhaland, and a month-long *bandh* crippled life in Darjeeling. In September 2013 the ILTA invited the Chief Minister to Darjeeling (*ToI*, 1.9.2013). While most people remained inside their houses as part of the "*ghar bhitra jantā*" (people inside the houses) agitation of the *Morcha*, members of the Lepcha community welcomed the CM in Kalimpong and conferred to her the honorary title "Kingchum Daarmit" (Goddess of Fortune) (*The Hindustan Times*, 3.9.2013)[189]. In July 2014, the CM announced the establishment of a comparable "Tamang Welfare and Cultural Board", announcing a 100 million INR grant for it (*The Hindu*, 18.7.2014).

How does one read these recent developments? It would be misleading to understand the establishment of these Boards as expressions of a generous State government caring for scheduled tribes. Rather, these councils can be seen as an attempt of the TMC to further establish its base in Darjeeling hills. Although the council's resources are limited (Bentley, personal communication) its existence outside the purview of the GJM's GTA can be seen as an attempt of the State government (and Lepcha- and Tamang-associations alike) to break the GJM's resource monopoly by providing members of the communities an alternate way to access resources. The MLLDB and the Tamang board institutionalised a direct link between these communities and the State government and provided a means for the TMC to establish clientelist relations to these groups. This ultimately supported TMC's attempts to establish its base further in the hills. In the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections both Lepcha and Tamang associations announced their support to the TMC. This underlines these newly evolving patronage relations.

But in how far do such attempts for tribal recognition as alternative avenues to negotiate rights and resources with the State exemplify a way of resistance to the GJM? Can they be regarded as an alternative political space evolving outside the emporium of Gorkhaland? On a first view, they certainly can, because they provide a platform for political association at least partly outside of the

[189] This was strictly opposed by members of the Darjeeling-based All India Lepcha Organisation, which is close to the *Morcha*.

party-political, and surely outside of Gorkhaland-realm. Tribal associations manage to enter into a direct relationship with the state without the GJM as intermediary. Tribal associations (especially the Lepcha association ILTA) are a form of resistance against the GJM’s rule as they challenge the party’s established resource monopolies over developmental funds. Further, their ability to mobilise their groups allows them to chose their political affiliation more freely. Their demands also express an agenda of rights and recognition, of citizens demanding what they believe is their justified entitlement towards the state. Bentley also found indications for interactions between the Tamang and the Lepcha, which run along the TMC party-political lines.

A closer look at these associations, however, suggests caution on their ability to provide alternative avenues for regional political practice. Middleton and Shneiderman (2008) for instance found that ethnic associations in Darjeeling exercised a “cultural policing” to prove the “tribalness” of their members towards the government. This included the enforcement of a dress code and the curbing of Hindu festivals, which ultimately led to more politicisation and the limitation of free choices: “Average individual cultural choices have now become political [...], creating divides within both ethnic communities and families” (ibid. 41). They also found that the “cultural engineering [...] is shot through with class relations, with elites coaching and coaxing their constituents into the proper ‘tribal’ mold, the results being power-laden alterations in daily life” (ibid.). Like the GJM, it is questionable in how far ethnic associations can be regarded as representatives of their groups, or whether their leaders exploit public aspirations for recognition and rights to further their individual interests.

In addition, the relation of these associations to the ruling party or other regional parties is not as clear-cut as it might seem. Middleton stressed that the associations always had to carefully negotiate their relations and to “cozy-up” with the ruling party (GNLF/GJM). While the diversity of associations makes it difficult to generalise, he explained that many of their members were members of political parties, too (Middleton, personal communication). Anecdotes hold that Bimal Gurung even prohibited meetings of the Rai association in his strong-hold Tukvar/Singmari fearing that these could associate with CPRM-president R.B. Rai (who himself, however, does not have a relation to the association). However, the intermingling of the ruling party and the associations is underlined by the fact that the GJM supported the pending applications for ST-recognition in the GTA agreement. Maybe, the GJM has realised that support to the demands for tribal recognition is the safer way to maintain a majority than opposing the associations, particularly after some of them were granted state-sponsored development boards outside the purview of the GTA.

It thus remains an open question whether the “tribal revival” in Darjeeling hills can count as a counter-strategy of parts of Darjeeling’s population against the GJM. While the tribal move certainly

benefits the TMC government, I have doubts whether the associations would attempt to empower their group members or rather replicate existing power-relations in the name of “tribal” recognition.

8.3 Conclusion

This chapter’s objective was to explore limits of the GJM’s money and muscle power, and to display instances, where groups or individuals broke their silence and challenged the *Morcha*’s authority. It showed that a loss of trust in the possibility to achieve Gorkhaland and in the GJM’s willingness and ability to provide tangible benefits made many people doubt their affiliation to the dominant party. This indicates that both the loss of normative and factual legitimacy led to a decline in the GJM’s support base. Critique of the GJM had already increased since its involvement in negotiations on an “interim-council” after March 2010. But that critique began to come out into the open only after the eventual agreement on the GTA in July 2011, and the actual establishment of the new council in August 2012. This is indicated by the increasing activities of rival parties since 2012, i.e. the CPRM’s successful claim to Chowk Bazaar in May 2012, the return of GNLF president Ghisingh to Darjeeling hills in 2014, and the increasing activities of the TMC. As I demonstrated, such forms of opposition are based on differing premises.

The first such example was opposition parties’ attempts to counter the GJM with ideal pictures of leaders drawing on qualities of trustworthiness and non-violence. Although the chances of such leaders seem small to attain power in Darjeeling under the prevailing conditions, such ideal pictures can be regarded as important means to oppose the *Morcha* in the imaginary realm. They propose a morally more-appealing alternative to the reign of GJM leaders, which partly reflects popular imaginations of “good” leaders (compare Chapter 5). The example of CPRM activists, who – inspite of being in economic need – refused to benefit from the GJM’s patronage suggests that there are indeed some persons who evaluate morally “good” conduct of a leader and a party higher than material spoils or “money power”. Importantly, for these opposition parties (AIGL, CPRM, etc.) the demand of “Gorkhaland” and the need to address the “identity-crisis” provide the anchor to stick to their ideals even if this means refusal of material spoils. The CPRM is further sustained through its organisational cadre-structure and its class-ideology, which is taught in local circles and adds an ideological dimension that other regional parties in Darjeeling lack.

This underlines the limits of “money power” and suggests a moral orientation of some groups in contrast to an “all-pervasive instrumentalism which washes away party manifestoes, rhetoric, and effective implementation of policies in an unending competition for power, status, and profit” (Brass

1990, 19). Instead, perceptions of moral values and belief in an ideology do not only *matter* to some people but also influence their political agency. Such different “moral communities” (cf. Lentz 1998) provide an important counter-balance to the model of “patronage democracy” (Chandra 2003). In this context, the huge attendance at the CPRM’s May Day celebrations in 2012, does not only underline the mobilising function of a “poor” party but also exemplifies attempts to create a public space, where a number of people gather to express their own will and to collectively challenge the dominance of the ruling party. In a way CPRM and AIGL critique points at the lack of perceived legitimacy of the *Morcha* after its perceived decline on the statehood agenda and underlines the limits of the GJM’s “double-dealing” (cf. Jeffrey 2010, 135) (i.e. as promoter of statehood and radical challenger to the State on the one hand and as a channel of government sponsored development funds on the other hand) (see Chapter 6). Yet, neither the AIGL nor the CPRM succeeded in carrying such outrage back to the localities in which the struggle over resources is also fought. Instead, back in their villages the activists (in minority) often remain silent and do not dare to openly challenge the local leaders of the ruling party. They often depend on the action of the administration in supporting their critique. The AIGL’s and CPRM’s inactivity, when it comes to expand and establish local branches, clearly confines their challenges to the GJM to the rhetoric realm and has relatively little effect on the actual control of the GJM.

Tribal associations, however, seem to be more effective in challenging the *Morcha*. The inability to stop the Lepcha Rights Movement’s demands for a developmental board not only signalled a limit to the GJM’s authority but also to its position as a self-appointed representative of the masses once the government recognises other partners for negotiations.

The greatest practical challenge to the GJM is, however, posed by the TMC, the ruling party of the State government, which increased its activities in Darjeeling since 2012. This growing influence becomes visible in the establishment of developmental boards for the Lepcha and Tamang which provide alternative means for these groups to access resources outside the realm of GTA and the GJM patronage. This situation was accentuated by the fact that even two years after the establishment of the GTA not all departments had been transferred to the GTA, including the important department of public-works, which remained under the State’s authority. The existence of the TMC provides a means for individuals to “bargain” for benefits with both the State government and the GJM, rendering political affiliations in Darjeeling more fluid. Accounts also suggest that the State government – via its control over the police – provides security for those who join the TMC, thereby limiting the fear of violent repression by the GJM or its “muscle” power. Against this backdrop the GNLF-TMC alliance for the 2014 elections is not surprising but rather suggests that it was Ghisingh’s ticket back to the hills. The TMC beats the GJM with its own means and thereby

ultimately sustains the reign of “money” and “muscle”. Ultimately, the employment of CRPF forces during the short-term statehood agitation in August 2013 and the arrests of more than 1,200 *Morcha*-activists including elected GTA councillors on the basis of old cases (see Chapter 1), showed that indeed the Chief Minister can be “rough and tough”, and can enforce the legal arm if needed.

This shows that it is ultimately the State government, which has a decisive role in either shrinking or expanding the spaces for political competition for other regional actors in the hills. It shapes the conditions and possibilities for other actors to raise their voices. Such provision of spaces for critique seems yet not guided by concerns for democracy or law but by political considerations. These include the sharpening of fractures within the hill society, both in party-political as well as in social (i.e. tribal/non-tribal groups) realms. This indicates that much of the “resistance” to the *Morcha* is not only *enabled* by the State government but also a *product* designed as part of the strategy to control the regional ruling party and the agitation for Gorkhaland. In this context, “democracy” becomes an expensive good to be purchased from a government interested in keeping the upper hand over a population which demands autonomy.

Some believe that Madan Tamang was not only murdered by GJM activists but that the then-State government secretly facilitated the murder to gain an effective means to exercise pressure on the GJM whose leaders’ names function in the charge sheet (see Chapter 7). Madan Tamangs’s death made the power-relations in Darjeeling visible, where a dominant party gains the temporary status of a sovereign at the will of the State government. In her closing words to the AIGL Madan Tamang memorial ceremony in 2012, his wife Bharati Tamang requested people in Darjeeling to place candles in their doors and window frames as a sign of remembrance. But I did not see a single candle lit in Darjeeling town that night.

9 Conclusion: After Gorkhaland

9.1 Statehood movements and authoritarian regimes

I began this study on the Gorkhaland agitation with reference to positive evaluations of movements for new States in India. Studies in the tradition of what I have called the "decentralisation thesis" view them as part of the "spread of democracy" (Kohli 2001, 2). As a form of grassroots struggle, they challenge established forms of politics (Kaviraj 1989) and lead to a greater decentralisation that fosters greater participation by citizens in governance, including easier access to state resources.

Although I agreed to the contention in these studies that movements are related to the emergence of a more "aware citizenry", which is placing demands for recognition and redistribution on the state, my insights in Darjeeling led me to challenge the other propositions of this "decentralisation thesis". As my study underlined, statehood agitation here is entirely led by regional political parties, one of which attains leadership while marginalising the others by breaching the principles of substantial democracy. Following Levitsky and Way (2002), I termed this situation a dominant-party or competitive authoritarian regime.

The Darjeeling case raised the question of how a statehood movement expressed in the language of rights, freedom from exploitation and democracy could co-exist with such a repressive dominant party regime headed by the self-proclaimed leaders of the statehood agitation. This puzzle led to the following research questions (see Chapter 1):

- Why is the dominant-party regime in Darjeeling so stable? What are the incumbent party's strategies for ruling? What are the limitations to its rule?
- How are such strategies for ruling perceived and evaluated by the ruled? Why would rights-seeking and presumably "aware citizens" lend support to a party whose ways of ruling through corruption and repression apparently contradict such aspirations? Why do people not follow another regional party that promotes the same ethno-regional agenda?
- What are the relations between the statehood movement and the regional dominant party regime? Does the movement help to sustain the regime, and if so, in what way?

My study pursued two major aims while seeking to answer these questions. First, it sought to understand the construction of the GJM's political authority by contrasting strategies for ruling with perceptions and responses among the ruled.

Second, this study attempted to critically examine the relations between the statehood movement and the regional political regime. Departing from studies which explore the legal and administrative outcomes of statehood movements (e.g. the establishment of new States, concessions of autonomy) (Chadda 2002; Shah 2010; Adeney 2002; Bhattacharyya 2005), I attempted to research the political effects of the movement on the region for which autonomy is sought. Answers to these questions contribute to a better understanding not only of the effects of statehood movements but also of the stability of competitive authoritarian regimes.

To answer these questions this study made a major proposition concerning the conceptualisation of "movement" and "party". Transcending clear distinctions between the two, I drew on Kumar (2011) to conceptualise the movement as a "party-political" movement, and on Kitschelt (2006) and Basu (2001) to frame the GJM - the ruling party in Darjeeling - as a "movement-party" espousing a dual identity, both a radical movement and an accommodative political party.

This conceptualisation not only emphasised the movement's intermingling of broader State and national level politics. It also enabled me to analyse the statehood movement and internal struggles over its leadership through the prism of party-political contestations. Further, questioning these labels in a critical manner allowed me to account for their emic meanings, i.e. explore what meanings these convey for those participating in the "movement" or affected by the "party".

To approach the conflation of movement and party politics, and the construction of political authority in the broader context of the statehood agitation, I further combined two distinct bodies of work: (i) studies on competitive authoritarian regimes grounded in comparative politics; and (ii) anthropological approaches to the study of political authority in South Asia.

The former identifies three main strategies for explaining the stability of authoritarian regimes: repression, co-optation/patronage, and legitimacy (Gerschewski et al. 2012). I juxtaposed these strategies with a discussion of their perceptions amongst the ruled. Drawing on an understanding of political authority as a dynamic and socially contested outcome of the two-sided relations between rulers and the ruled, contingent on historical, socio-economic contexts (Weber 1972; Straßenberger 2013; Karateke 2005), I argued that acceptance of, compliance with or resistance to a ruler are dependent on the quality of this two-sided relationship. Thus the success or failure of an incumbent's rule cannot be explained solely with reference to his/her strategies. Rather, the success and effects of such strategies depends on their perception and interpretation amongst the ruled. These perceptions are themselves dynamic outcomes of changing subjectivities including the degree of awareness of political rights.

Another concept closely related to the construction of authority was that of legitimacy. Drawing on Karateke's (2005) framework of political legitimacy, I conceptualised it as the degree of intersection between the demands of the ruled towards the ruler (the "demand" side) and the ruler's ability to live up to these by providing factual or normative goods (the "supply" side) (ibid).

To account for such qualitative and locally constructed relations, I complemented the largely quantitative and national studies from comparative politics with anthropological approaches. These qualitative local approaches underlined the context-specific and socially contested conditions for ruling in authoritative regimes. These helped me to better account for the different views and constraints of the ruled in authoritarian systems, and to explain dynamic changes in different parties' support bases.

Methodologically, the study was grounded in a qualitative and constructivist paradigm. I applied multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) to account for the different sites and levels of the construction of political authority, and to juxtapose perspectives on the rulers/the ruled, the movement, and the party. This multi-level approach outlined the role of higher authorities in the regional political set-up in Darjeeling, and to see incumbents' rule as embedded in broader State and national-level structures.

This study explicitly focussed on tea plantation workers and residents as a major constituency of political parties. Thus, while many studies in comparative politics emphasise the regional elites' and functional groups' role in sustaining regimes, this study highlighted the decisive role of the mass of the ruled, whom I divided into activists, passive followers and rivals.

I shall now answer the above research questions by synthesising the main findings of this study. I first address the construction of political authority and legitimacy by discussing the strategies for ruling in relation to the ruled's motives of compliance. I pay particular attention to the historical and socio-economic context that shapes such motives (Chapter 9.2). I then outline the limits of the GJM's rule. This includes particular attention to the role of the state in Darjeeling (Chapter 9.3). I then turn to the question of the relations between the statehood movement and the dominant party regime in Darjeeling (Chapter 9.4). Chapter 9.5 presents the overall conclusion of my study, which is that statehood movements can be an important element in sustaining authoritarian rulers and are thus not necessarily the best ways to achieve decentralisation, democratisation, and "justice".

9.2 Motives for compliance and strategies for ruling

This study identified leaders' reputation management, investment in the normative ethno-regional statehood agenda in combination with political patronage and forms of repression as major strategies for ruling[190]. But why did the ruled in Darjeeling comply with or support the regime, and why is the combination of strategies for ruling I have identified apparently so successful in Darjeeling?

In discussing these issues, I followed Gerschewski et al. (2012) who identified three motives based on which the ruled comply with authoritarian rulers: they regard them as rightful; they benefit from co-optation/patronage; or they fear sanctions. Although I generally agreed with these, I argued that they must be treated as context-specific and not as uniform for the ruled as a whole. This included asking about the conditions and the basis for defining differing perceptions of "rightfulness", expectations of "benefits" and the factors framing "fear". Paying attention to these questions underlines my claim that these motives can only be understood with regard to the specific historic and socio-economic conditions that shape them. Accordingly, any understanding of the success or failure of incumbents' strategies for ruling, and the longevity of a political regime must pay attention to such place-specific circumstances.

Belief in rightfulness I – Normative legitimacy and Gorkhaland

As explored in Chapter 1, the belief in a leader's or regime's rightfulness (or legitimacy) can be generated through normative/programmatic and/or factual means (what Karateke (2005) called "normative" or "factual legitimacy").

Regarding normative legitimacy, Chapter 4 demonstrated the strong emotional and ideological appeal that the ethno-regional statehood agenda holds for the ruled, especially for tea plantation workers and residents. For them, aspirations for a better life, improved working conditions, social and livelihoods security, and recognition as Indian citizens together defined their vision of Gorkhaland. These aspirations were clearly grounded in their socio-economic environment, characterised by harsh and hierarchical working conditions, and perceived exploitation.

[190] Some accounts also pointed to the influence of the party in other realms, including water distribution, forestry/timber or real-estate development. Further exploration of these realms might have underlined the economically-material aspects of the party's rule and added to the variety of interests coming together under the heading of statehood. Another aspect lacking in the study is the role of religion and religious leaders play in stabilising the incumbents' dominance (see report by Thomas Shor (2014)). One last aspect which I only briefly addressed is the role of gender and perceptions of masculinity and femininity in the party and the movement.

The strong emotional and utopian appeal makes Gorkhaland a powerful basis for the normative legitimacy of political parties. The respective dominant parties (i.e. GNLF, GJM) attempt to monopolise the statehood idea, while denying rival parties the right to contend for the cause by questioning their honesty. Chapter 5 identified GJM leader Bimal Gurung's self-presentation as able and committed contender for Gorkhaland as an important element of his reputation management.

Yet, although my study underlined that gaining normative legitimacy through investing into the ethno-regional statehood agenda is a necessary condition for gaining power, it is not sufficient; rather, a ruler has to complement normative appeals with factual deliveries of goods and services.

Belief in rightfulness II – Factual legitimacy and patronage

Despite the normative commitment of party followers to the Gorkhaland agenda, Chapters 5 and 6 underlined that many not only expected the ruling party to achieve statehood but also to deliver jobs, developmental projects, contracts, and other forms of financial support. Chapters 6 and 8 underlined that such material aspirations became more pronounced with the GJM's perceived rollback on the statehood agenda and after the establishment of a new autonomous council.

In a socio-economic context that offers few opportunities for people to improve their livelihoods, the unemployed in particular began to see the party as a vehicle that could not (only) bring forward the statehood agenda. They (also) perceived it as holding the power over the distribution of developmental goods, and increasingly posed demands for the distribution of material benefits on its leaders. Thus, active support for the party did not necessarily express a commitment to Gorkhaland; Chapter 6 showed that many active members saw it (also) as a means to gain access to the resources of the developmental state and other benefits. While tea workers and the unemployed strove to improve their socio-economic condition and class status, elite groups (especially wealthy contractors and businessmen) wanted to maintain or further enhance their status. Although its declining commitment to the statehood agenda diminished the GJM's normative legitimacy, the agreement on the GTA held the promise of more factual developmental and material benefits for those close to the party.

Importantly, such aspirations for factual deliveries do not simply reflect a benefit-maximising logic of patronage receivers. Hopes for factual deliveries through leaders are also grounded in more general concerns about social equality and a fear of being exploited by leaders. They reflect moral values that define what a "good" leader should be like, i.e. he/she should share his wealth and offer something in return for people's political support. Bimal Gurung tried to cater to such aspirations by investing in a reputation for being an able and generous "social worker", in addition to his programmatic commitment to Gorkhaland. To be able to deliver goods, the GJM established resource monopolies

via its control over the DGHC (and later GTA) and locally implemented development schemes. The perceived conditional delivery of benefits sustained the belief that only those close to the party would benefit. Thus, while some saw their material demands fulfilled, others underlined their fear from exclusion and repression if criticising the party, pointing to the repressive function of the GJM's patronage.

The importance of such factual demands, in addition to programmatic aspirations (i.e. normative legitimacy), is underlined by the experience of other regional parties, which – despite promoting Gorkhaland – did not manage to mount a serious challenge to either Ghisingh or Gurung.

Fear and repression

Despite the GJM's attempts to generate normative and factual legitimacy, Chapters 5 and 6 showed that the party was increasingly perceived as failing on both counts. Instead, many began to perceive the GJM as an exploitive party led by "selfish" leaders who cater for their own needs instead of others'. Apparently, the GJM failed to live up to the "demand" side of their constituents. This applies to both the senior party leadership and to local activists, whom many blamed for siphoning off the benefits of development and welfare schemes intended for the "community". This raised the question of why a majority continued to support the GJM. This brings me to the role of fear and repression.

Chapters 6 and 7 showed that many persons critical of the GJM still supported it because they feared repression if they took a public stand against the majority. The fear of being excluded from access to state resources, of becoming a victim of a "social boycott" in such a close-knit interdependent society, of being denied union support at the tea plantation, and the fear of suffering physical harm stopped most people from voicing any criticism of what many of them saw as morally objectionable practices by ruling politicians in Darjeeling.

At the heart of these apprehensions stands a historical fear with its roots in *chhyāsī* (the 1986-agitation). The horrific memories of this civil war, in which those labelled "rivals" of the Gorkhaland demand faced physical harm at the hands of GNLF activists, while those in favour of the demand were exposed to attacks, rape and arson by state-backed rivals, still generates fear of multiple parties in villages and open political contestations to this day. The functional role of many village *samāj* in switching political affiliations *as a whole community* in 2007/08, and the frequent statement that "staying with the 'majority' [Engl.] is safe", confirms that for most inhabitants of Darjeeling the "correct" political affiliation is a question of survival and a means of protection from anticipated harm and victimisation. The oft-heard statement that "nobody wants to take a risk" expresses this

fear of victimisation. This "fear psychosis" (as some in Darjeeling call it) shapes both people's political agencies and social behaviour.

Chapter 7 showed that this fear is kept alive not only through spectacular performances of violence, e.g. the public murder of AIGL president Madan Tamang allegedly carried out by GJM activists, but also through smaller, more underhand forms of hard repression (e.g. in the form of threats to those critical of local party leaders) keep the fear of "being against the majority" alive. Many regarded the hierarchical and interconnected party organisation as a surveillance tool that has allowed senior leaders to gain information about possible defections from their local *shakhā* activists. Local party leaders play a functional role in this. They are not only feared as spies transmitting the news of possible defectors to the upper echelons of the party, but also regarded as gatekeepers for local development or state welfare programmes. Many accounts suggest that it was these persons in the main who maintain a certain level of fear among the (passive) followers and rivals locally, and this underscores their role in maintaining local power relations. Social cleavages such as these among the ruled breed a lack of mutual trust, and make many even more fearful about discussing the "party" and "politics" with each other.

Such historically grounded apprehensions and social cleavages make repression a rather "cheap" strategy in Darjeeling. Occasional threats and some incidents of inter-party violence seemed sufficient to instigate and maintain such fear. Furthermore, violence not only helped the GJM to enforce its resource monopolies (as shown in Chapter 6), but also helped the GJM and its president to generate images of a (frightening) strongman party. Chapter 7 displayed how GJM leaders even tried to reinterpret violent events to present themselves as "non-violent", which suggests that violence has a "functional utility" (Brass 1997) for the GJM.

Leader Bimal Gurung also portrayed himself as a strongman capable of using his "muscle" if necessary. Thus, by virtue of his reputations as a committed fighter for Gorkhaland and a social worker, he did not simply cater successfully for moral or transactional aspirations; he also underscored his authority with a clear reference to his "muscle". These reputations made him more attractive (and frightening) than other regional leaders who demanded Gorkhaland.

The silence of the sachet jantā

So what about the "aware person" or *sachet jantā*? My study showed that many people in Darjeeling *do* aspire to justice and improved access to the state. They *have* an awareness of their rights and entitlements. They *do* criticise their own leaders for failing to live up to moral and material expectations. But the widespread fear of violence and repression, coupled with the longing for self-preservation or aggrandizement, renders most of the Darjeeling *sachet jantā* silent. They are *sachet*

jantā without any teeth and without a united voice. Keeping silent and "staying with the majority" were pragmatic strategies, which most believed would provide safety in a context prone to political violence. It is this need for self-preservation and pragmatism that governs their decision to follow the ruling party.

This makes the idiom of *sachet jantā* itself an ideal to which people aspire, but to which most cannot live up in their actual political and social practices. Like Gorkhaland, it remains a dream without implementation. Instead, it becomes a label for politicians to present their rule as based on the presumed and proclaimed "democratic" approval of a critical and rights-seeking citizenry. It is not hard to claim this if the *sachet jantā* remain silent. This also answers the question as to why the critical juncture of 2007/08 in Darjeeling, initiated by the succession of the GNLF by the GJM, did not lead to general regime change where principles of substantial democracy are followed. Analysis of the GJM's strategies for ruling and their success amongst a majority of the population suggests that the change of party alone is not sufficient if the overall conditions for ruling – fear, socio-economic context, social cleavages – do not change too.

9.3 Limits to the GJM's rule

Although the GJM's rule appeared to be stable throughout the time I was doing my research, Chapters 6 and 8 also suggested that it is not total and is built on relatively shaky foundations. While the GJM managed to compensate for losses of normative legitimacy with factual deliveries and repression, my analysis revealed (in contrast to Gerschewski et al. (2012) and Gerschewski (2014) who pointed at the complementary nature of these strategies) that these can also be in conflict with each other.

In identifying the limits to the GJM's rule, I first address different political support bases that constitute different "moral communities" (Lentz 1998, 62) in Darjeeling. I then turn to the problems arising from the GJM's attempts to deliver both normative and factual goods, before addressing the role of the state in maintaining (or limiting) the GJM's dominance, and the political regime in Darjeeling in general.

"Moral communities" - Material versus moral concerns

Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) and others (Greene 2007; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009) have argued that people with an independent and strong economic base are more likely to support a party based on its manifesto, rather than expectations of benefits for them. However, my study showed that the

socio-economic background alone is not a sufficient explanation for individuals' involvement in clientelist or programmatic politics. Rather, society is made up of different "moral communities" (Lentz 1998), which evaluate leaders' conduct according to different criteria. This reinforces the observation that support or compliance to a ruler is not uniform across a society (Hardin 2009; Burnell 2006; Alfonso, Kennedy, and Escalona 2004).

For instance, the example of CPRM activists suggested that even those with a weaker economic base can stick to a programmatic politics and actively refuse to benefit from material spoils. They believed that a leader's commitment to the statehood cause and the solution of the "identity crisis" was more important than benefiting from patronage or receiving "development". This refusal makes CPRM members more "immune" to attempts by the GJM to win their support by distributing material benefits.

Such different bases of evaluation were also embodied in ideal pictures of morally "good" leaders as promoted by the GJM's rival parties. Yet the little support such alternate leaders receive suggests that it is rather unlikely for a majority guided by fear and pragmatic needs to produce and actively support a "honest" leader whose rule is not based on "money" or "muscle".

Trade-offs and "double-dealing"

Even authoritarian rulers cannot rule entirely by ignoring the needs of their constituents. My study showed that the mass of the ruled is not only important to sustain an incumbent by virtue of their electoral and political support. Their morally and materially based demands also set the rules for leaders' conduct, and cause difficulties for the leaders to live up to both these demands. This leads to a second limitation of the GJM's rule, which is the difficulty of juggling the normative and factual bases of its legitimacy. I showed above that the GJM's leaders were under pressure not only to promote the statehood demand, but also to deliver on the development front. This raises the issue of the problematic implications of such a dual pressure on the interrelations between the regime-sustaining pillars of legitimacy and co-optation/patronage.

While Gerschewski et al. (2012) pointed to the complementary relations between the two, Chapters 6 and 8 showed that leaders' need to deliver both statehood and factual goods entails serious trade-offs between the pillars of legitimacy and patronage. If the party demands statehood by challenging the State government, it lives up to normative expectations of its constituents but risks halting the flow of state-sponsored resources that it requires to be able to distribute patronage and maintain its "mobilising function" (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010); if the party cosies up to the government and rolls back on demands for autonomy in order to ensure a steady flow of resources, it invests into factual

legitimacy through patronage but compromises on its normative legitimacy (i.e. statehood agenda). This trade-off forces the party to engage in "double-dealing" (Jeffrey 2010, 135). To convince supporters of its commitment to the statehood agenda, the GJM took part in radical "movement" activities; to secure a regular supply of patronage resources the party had to present itself as a partner who was open to negotiations with the government. Thus the GJM's dual identity (radical-normative movement and accommodative-distributive party identities) reflect this double-dealing. In the longer term however, such fluctuations make the party appear less credible for those with aspirations for Gorkhaland. As Chapters 3 (on the GNLF) and 8 underlined, the ruling party's failure to balance both these identities increased the risk of party defections and opened up space for the opposition to gain strength.

Dependence on the state

This points to a third important factor that possibly destabilises the GJM's rule: its reliance on the sufficient flow of state-sponsored developmental resources (see Chapter 6). My analysis underlined the fact that state concessions for regional autonomy support the party's resource monopoly and thus stabilise their rule.

The government also has the ability to facilitate or restrict attempts for resistance against GJM rule. This is because, ultimately, the government frames the legal rules for political actors in Darjeeling (e.g. by granting permission for public meetings, or controlling the police/paramilitary forces), and therefore has the potential to support (or limit) "resistance" to the dominant party.

Chapter 8 underlined that such resistance by rival parties or associations itself becomes part of the state strategy for controlling the GJM and with it, the movement for Gorkhaland. The establishment of the Development Boards for the Lepcha or Tamang, for instance, is believed to be a means of deepening fractures within the hill society. In this way, resistance becomes part of the government's attempt to maintain both its authority and the territorial integrity of the West Bengal State. In a way, the State government outsources its own sovereignty to the ruling party, whose leaders rule at the State's whim. Therefore, the state has the power to limit the GJM's dominance; but it is unlikely that the government would also engage in creating conditions for a *regime* change in Darjeeling. Thus substantial resistance in Darjeeling would include reclaiming the Darjeeling hills by refusing to become a pawn in the game between the state and the regional ruling party.

9.4 The movement as the end to democracy?

I now turn to the last of my research questions: whether, and if, the existence of the statehood movement contributes to the stability of the authoritarian regime, expressed in the dominant-party rule of the GJM. Having framed the movement as "party-political", and the GJM as a "movement-party", my analysis revealed that the authoritarian regime and statehood movement in Darjeeling are not only co-existent but depend on each other. In other words: the dominant party regime's survival depends strongly on the continuation of the statehood movement and its broad public appeal as the apparent solution to the actual and constructed problems and grievances.

So far I have shown that the ruling party derives its normative legitimacy by drawing on and monopolising the popular Gorkhaland agenda. Second, I showed that the state sustains (and thereby controls) the regional political elite in order to avoid new forceful agitation for statehood. This is done by financing patronage goods (via the autonomous council), and by recognising it as the sole negotiation partner. Thus the GJM's dominance is also sustained by the lack of commitment of the government to creating a more enabling and "democratic" environment. In the longer term, this sustains the competitive authoritarian regime, even if one party succeeds a previously ruling party (as happened in 2007/08) and revives demands for statehood.

I now discuss three more dimensions that make the statehood movement a hindrance to the fostering more substantial democracy and decentralisation. First, the utopian rhetoric of the movement foreclose alternative ways of representing citizens' positions towards the state by privileging the ethno-regional agenda over others; second, the movement's projection of the state as the main enemy obscures the role ruling elites play in maintaining the conditions against which people are protesting; and third, instead of uniting the population, political parties' attempts to gain the monopoly of the movement creates divisions between so-called contenders and rivals of statehood. I detail each of these claims in the following section.

Foreclosing alternative avenues to the state

In Chapter 3 I showed how the establishment of the GNLF as the dominant party was coupled with the privileging of ethnic identity (over class) in people's subjectivities, and with mythmaking that Gorkhaland would be a remedy to all real and imagined political and socio-economic problems. Chapter 4 highlighted the fact that this myth continues in - and is kept alive by - the way political leaders frame the Gorkhaland demand. Although the ruling elites in Darjeeling barely address the issues many of their constituents found important (such as the labour and land issues), the ruled still see the statehood movement as the main vehicle for claiming rights and justice from the state.

In Chapter 4 I argued that the strong support and belief in the Gorkhaland vision among tea plantation labourers and residents also stems from a conflation of ethnic and class identities. For them, the Gorkhaland issue does not marginalise their labour agenda; instead the ethno-regional agenda subsumes their class identities. Due to the lack of attention the political elites pay to such labour problems and the priority they give to the seemingly immaterial "identity crisis", however, the all-encompassing idea of Gorkhaland obscures the more immediate problems of people which could be addressed *without* Gorkhaland and thus beyond the reach of the dominant party. This includes the situation on the tea estates, or development and environmental concerns.

The dominant party's forceful framing of the ethno-regional statehood agenda and the resulting dominance of ethnicity over other identities (such as class), coupled with an agenda to silence rival voices, forecloses alternative ways for people to negotiate their relations with the state.

Obscuring the role of ruling elites

While this study identified the harmful role the ruling party's political elites play in maintaining the status quo, the Gorkhaland rhetoric helps them to divert attention and instead identify a Bengali-dominated State government as the sole and main enemy of the Gorkha ethnic group, instead of addressing inequalities. The Gorkhaland imagination thus obscures the role of the ruling elite in maintaining the very conditions against which many people are protesting. This applies to both material and symbolic conditions.

For instance, Chapter 6 clearly demonstrated that instead of levelling social inequalities, the dominant party increased these via its exclusive patronage; ironically, the continuing lack of development simultaneously gives the same leaders an excuse to claim that "only a separate State" would address people's grievances.

Yet the political elites foster – at least indirectly – not just the material conditions behind the demand for Gorkhaland, but also immaterial ones. These include the so-called "identity crisis", which the rulers present as the only explanation for people's experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation as citizens of Nepal. This forecloses considerations of other possible explanations for such experiences.

However, the contention that a separate ethno-linguistic State could address these problems is questionable. The Gorkhas are not the only group in India facing constant discrimination. Various incidents in towns like Delhi or Bangalore with a large north-eastern population underline that even those who "have their own State" (i.e. from Megalaya or Manipur) face similar discrimination from other "mainland" Indians.

Further, I propose that one should not neglect the possible relatedness of the "identity crisis" to differences in class and economic/educational status. Also in Darjeeling district itself, tea plantations workers are subjected to demeaning comments in the district's towns. The idiom *talako keṭāharu* ("boys from down there", i.e. tea plantations, see Chapter 7) is one example of the social and class-based cleavages between the urban and rural populations. These are certainly not ethnicity-based, but stem instead from perceived differences in income, class and behaviour. Assuming that the political "identity crisis" too has a material basis, then it is the very people who refuse or fail to address socio-economic issues seriously (e.g. by reforming the tea economy system) who reproduce it; they maintain the very class divisions that underpin the feeling of discrimination and inferiority. Read in this way, the identity crisis becomes not a crisis of national recognition, but rather a crisis of political misconduct and/or governmental failure, exacerbated by an exploitative ruling elite. Neither regional autonomy (as demanded by the CPI-M and the TMC) nor statehood will be a remedy for *this* crisis. Yet as long as people believe in their *ethnically* based "identity crisis", the political elites will have a reason to demand Gorkhaland and power.

Divisions instead of unity

A final point that underscores the interrelatedness of the Gorkhaland movement and the authoritarian regime relates to its effect on social cohesion and unity. Although the movement for Gorkhaland as such has great potential to unite those fighting for the cause, the Darjeeling experience has shown that regional parties' attempts to monopolise the demand as a weapon in the struggle for political authority and resources has caused serious political splits in the population. Instead of fighting alongside other regional parties and associations for their common cause, the ruling leaders attempt to equate Gorkhaland with the ruling party. In this logic, anyone who challenges the ruling party is stigmatised as an enemy of the movement, and has to fear repression.

Also, the more recent move of Gorkha ethnic sub-groups to strive for scheduled tribe recognition – a move clearly welcomed by the State government – widens such divisions among the ruled and makes it more difficult for them to challenge the ruling party and the regime. This brings the widespread longing for a strong leader who can unite people back to the fore.

By creating divisions between alleged pro- and anti-Gorkhaland groups, and by obscuring the dominant role of the own political leaders, Gorkhaland is not a means for *liberation* but becomes a means of continuing oppression and division. The party – led by a strong and seemingly trustworthy leader – captures the movement and the issue so that those who support the statehood claim follow the party. This party – drawing on the Gorkhaland idea – continues to establish the state as the main enemy of the aware citizens, while concealing its own role in maintaining the very conditions against

which people are protesting. Thus, ultimately (and perversely), people's continuing support for the statehood claim reinstates the dominant party regime in Darjeeling. The monopolisation of the movement through the ruling party becomes both means and effect of its dominance. This underlines the fact that the capture of movements by political parties, and the strong conflation of party-political and social-movement identities, is ultimately detrimental to the cause of the movement.

Towards a better Gorkhaland?

The discussion above illustrates my major criticism of the decentralisation thesis, i.e. that movements for new States are not (necessarily) a vehicle for achieving rights for those at the grassroots. Although the movement's rhetoric suggests that these are expressions of a newly aware citizenry, which is demanding perceived rights and entitlements from the state, and that they have great liberating - and even revolutionary - *potential* to engender an issue-based programmatic politics, so-called "grassroots"-movements can themselves become a means for those who claim leadership over them to enact repression. The movements' potential to attract the masses makes them prone to capture by political parties. In Darjeeling, this led to the establishment of a dominant party regime, in which the incumbent systematically and regularly violates the rules of substantial democracy, and thereby diminishes other regional parties' chances of attaining power. Thus the statehood movement and the dominant-party regime not only co-exist, but *depend* on each other.

The fact that the Gorkhaland movement has been taken over by political parties has serious consequences for its future course, its potential for social inclusion/exclusion, and its meanings to those involved. Guided by pragmatism and material aspirations, a movement brought forward in the language of "democracy" and decentralisation became an arena for acquiring and fighting over material resources. This eventually weakened the movements' programmatic base, as paying lip-service to Gorkhaland decayed into a necessary requirement for becoming part of the "winning coalition" of a party that continues to draw on the ethno-regional statehood agenda for its normative legitimacy. Resistance can only be expressed openly by those willing to suffer political victimisation and exclusion from any material benefits, and/or accept social exclusion, physical harm or even death.

Thus a citizenry aware of its rights and entitlements from the state, and with aspirations for justice, redistribution and recognition, as embodied in the movement for statehood, are no guarantee, on their own, of greater local democracy and participation. The existence of a rights-based movement will only generate substantial change in the regional political regime if people recognise that it is their own chosen leaders that are preventing them from attaining their rights, and then have the

capacity, the bravery and the security to speak out against the injustices they observe. Such resistance would also include countering the state's attempts to sustain the regime by driving further divisions between people, e.g. by distributing patronage to select groups. Under current conditions, however, the statehood movement in Darjeeling is not a sign or expression of the "spread of democracy"; rather, it is the end of democracy.

This study has made a strong case for deconstructing the common labels of "movement", "autonomy" and "democracy". To offer one final, more positive contrast to this study's gloomy and pessimist overall outlook, however, I wish to stress that – although misused by the ruling elites – these labels still hold important meanings and promises for the people of Darjeeling. Their criticism of their political leaders' conduct, coupled with the continuing longing for a better life, contains potential for substantial political change, possibly beyond the idea of Gorkhaland. After all, as one respondent once suggested: "This is the land where the Gorkhas reside. Gorkhaland is already here." It depends on the people and the leaders they choose to make this Gorkhaland a land worth living in.

Appendix A. Timeline

Pre-Independence

1780	The expanding Gorkha Kingdom captures Sikkim and today's Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions
1814-1816	War between the East India Company and the expanding Gorkha Kingdom which the EIC wins
1816	Treaty of Sugauli which establishes today's boundaries between East-Nepal and India
1817	Treaty of Titalia; the EIC returns the ceded areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim to the Kingdom of Sikkim in return for rights to cross over Sikkimese territory into Tibet
1835	The Sikkim King gives areas of Darjeeling to the EIC as a 'Deed of Grant'; subsequently Darjeeling becomes a 'Hill Station'
1846	Establishment of a recruitment-centre for the British Indian Army in Darjeeling
1852	The commercial planting of tea in Darjeeling begins
1874	Darjeeling attains status as "scheduled district" under British governance
1865	Treaty of Sinchula ends the Anglo-Bhutan war; Bhutan cedes areas of today's Kalimpong sub-division to the British; Darjeeling district attains its final shape
1907	The Hill Men Association led by S.W. Laden La petitions for an administrative separation of Darjeeling from Bengal (reiterated in: 1917, 1920, 1929, 1930, 1934, 1935, 1941)
1919	Government of India Act makes Darjeeling a "backward tract"
1924	Foundation of the *Nepali Sahitya Samelan* (Nepali Literature Society)
1935	Government of India Act renders Darjeeling a "partially excluded area"
1936	Hill Men Association's leader S.W. Laden La dies
1940	Establishment of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Darjeeling
1944	Foundation of the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) in Darjeeling
1945	The CPI opens its tea labour union in Darjeeling, led by Ratanlal Brahmin
1946/1947	The CPI demands the creation of a new nation state "Gorkhasthan"

1947	AIGL proposes administrative separation from Bengal and merger of Darjeeling/Dooars with Assam; or the creation of an autonomous council

Post-Independence till 1979

1948	AIGL Proposal to PM Nehru suggesting three alternatives for Darjeeling: (i) creation of a separate administrative unit under central government, (ii) separate province comprising Darjeeling district and neighbouring areas; (iii) Darjeeling district with Dooars to be included in Assam
1948	AIGL president D.S. Gurung dies; Deo Prakash Rai becomes new AIGL president
1949	AIGL proposal for a separate "Uttarakhand" State (together with leaders from Sikkim, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar)
1951	West Bengal government declines the proposal to make Nepali the official language of the three hill-subdivisions of Darjeeling; start of the language movement
1952	Indian National Congress forms the first elected West Bengal government under CM B.C. Roy
1952	AIGL memorandum to PM Nehru in Kalimpong, demanding Darjeeling hills' separation from West Bengal by either creating separate administrative unit under the Centre, merging Darjeeling and Dooars with Assam, or creating a separate province including Darjeeling and neighbouring areas
1953	CPI Darjeeling District Committee, demand regional autonomy for whole Darjeeling district
1955	Six tea workers die in police firing at Margret's Hope tea estate in Kurseong sub-division during a labour movement jointly organised by CPI-M and AIGL
	Members of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) visit Darjeeling; joint group of hill organisations give memorandum to SRC, demanding separation of Darjeeling (along with Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar) from North Bengal
1956	The SRC publishes its report; Darjeeling is left outside of the purview of reorganisation
1957	B.C. Roy and Indian National Congress are re-elected to form the West Bengal government
	DDCC, AIGL and CPI submit memorandum to PM Nehru demanding autonomy for Darjeeling hills

1958	AIGL demands autonomous district council for Darjeeling district
1961	Formation of the *Bhasa Manyata Samiti*; census records show a 34 % increase in the number of Nepali speakers in Darjeeling hill-subdivisions; the West Bengal government includes Nepali in the Official Languages Act 1961 as an additional language in Darjeeling
1962	P.C. Sen becomes new CM in West Bengal with the Indian National Congress
1967	United Front (coalition of Left Parties) government in West Bengal dislodges the Congress for the first time in the State
	A group of rebel CPI-M leaders led by Kanu Sanjal starts the Naxalbadi uprising in the Darjeeling plains. The Naxals also establish some units in the Darjeeling hills.
	The West Bengal Assembly passes a resolution for Darjeeling's regional autonomy (without specifying the exact nature of autonomy)
1968	DDCC formulates resolution demanding the formation of autonomous administrative setup for Darjeeling
	Subash Ghisingh founds the *Nilo Jhanda Party*, and occupies properties in Darjeeling town
1969	United Front again wins the West Bengal Assembly elections
	Establishment of the *Nepali Bhasa Samiti*, to fight for the inclusion of Nepali in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution
1971 and 1972	Indian National Congress wins the West Bengal Assembly elections twice
1976	West Bengal government creates a Hill Development Council with solely nominated members
1977	Left Front wins elections to the West Bengal Assembly; Jyoti Basu becomes CM for the following 19 years.
1978, 1981	Left Front government in West Bengal passes resolutions demanding regional autonomy in the three hill-subdivisions of Darjeeling, and for an inclusion of Nepali into the 8th Schedule of the Indian constitution
1979/1980	Ethnic Nepalis are ousted from Assam and Manipur

The rise and reign of the GNLF: 1980-2007

1980	Establishment of the *Prantia Parishad*; demand for "Gorkhaland"
	Subash Ghisingh founds the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF),

	and demands Gorkhaland
1981	AIGL president D.P. Rai dies
1982	Left Front wins elections to the West Bengal Assembly
	CPI-M/CPM wins MLA seats from Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions
1985	Darjeeling CPI-M MP Ananda Pathak introduces a private member bill in the Indian parliament, demanding regional autonomy for Darjeeling
1986	May: outburst of violence between GNLF and CPI/CPI-M cadres during a GNLF-called 72-hours strike
	July, 27: the GNLF burns copies of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Nepal and India; nine GNLF activists die when the police fires into the crowd
	November: the government employs paramilitary forces in Darjeeling; further escalation of violence
1987	January: the central government calls Subash Ghising for talks to Delhi
1988	August: after a 40-day long strike in Darjeeling, the GNLF signs a tripartite agreement with the central and State government to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC); PM Rajeev Gandhi notifies the citizenship of all Indian Gorkhas who came to India prior 26 January 1950
	December: first elections to the DGHC are held; GNLF wins 26 out of 28 constituencies
1992	Nepali is added to the list of languages under the 8th Schedule of the Indian constitution
	73rd Constitutional Amendment Act disposses Darjeeling of the three-tier panchayat system, leaving only the local *gram panchayats* as elected bodies
	Madan Tamang establishes the Gorkha Democratic Front (GDF)
1996	Indian PM announces the creation of an Uttarakhand State. In reaction, a splinter-group of the Darjeeling CPI-M forms the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM) and demands Gorkhaland
1996	Formation of the Gorkha People's Front (GPF), consisting of GDF, CPRM, DDCC and AIGL
1999	GNLF wins the 3rd elections to the DGHC
2000	Elections to the *gram panchayats* held in Darjeeling
2001	Ghisingh survives a murder attempt near Kuresong

		Buddadeb Bhattacharjee becomes new West Bengal CM with the Left Front
2005		Ghisingh, the central and State government sign the memorandum to bring Darjeeling under the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution
		After elections to the DGHC were still not held, the DGHC councillors resign and the State government appoints Ghising as "caretaker chairman"
2007		GNLF-leader and ex-DGHC councillor Bimal Gurung supports the candidateship of Darjeeling-stemming Prashan Tamang in the *Indian Idol* singing competition, while Ghising ignores the event
	September, 23	Prashant Tamang wins the *Indian Idol* competition and mesmerises the masses. Bimal Gurung capitalises on his victory
	September 28/29	After a derogatory comment on Prashant Tamang by a Delhi-based radio jockey, protesting Prashant fans clash with locals in Siliguri; Bimal Gurung calls a one day strike in Darjeeling
	October 1	The union cabinet approves of the 6th Schedule bill; GNLF celebrates

From GNLF to GJM: October 2007 – July 2014

2007		
	October 7	Supported by the All Gorkha Student Union (AGSU), Bimal Gurung establishes the *Gorkha Janmukti Morcha* (GJM) at a massive meeting at Darjeeling Chowk Bazaar/Motor Stand; the new outfits demands the sacking of the 6th Schedule bill and Ghising, and initiates a forceful movement for the creation of Gorkhaland including day-long strikes, tax-boycotts, hunger-strikes and *gheraus* of government offices. The new movement leads to various clashes between GJM and GNLF activists in the following months. Many former GNLF leaders flee the hills subsequently.
	November 30	The 6th Schedule bill is referred to the Standing Committee of Home Affairs
	December 18-27	along with other regional parties the GJM attends the hearing on the 6th Schedule in Delhi; the parties pose a joint memorandum for the creation of Gorkhaland; upon returning to Darjeeling Bimal Gurung announces he will create Gorkhaland by March 10, 2010, or otherwise commit suicide
	December 30	AIGL president Madan Tamang demands "collective leadership" of the statehood movement
2008		
	February 18	GJM supporters block Ghisingh's from reaching the hills after he returned from Delhi

	February 29	The West Bengal government gives in to the pressure and gives Ghisingh an ultimatum to resign from his post as DGHC caretaker; the central government orders a re-assessment of the 6th Schedule bill
	March 5	Ghisingh resigns as DGHC caretaker; subsequently an IAS-officer is appointed as caretaker for the DGHC
	March 16	Ghisingh secretly returns to Darjeeling hills
	April	The GJM demands the dissolution of all *gram panchayat sabhas*; last elections had been held in 2000
	July 25	During a *gherau* of former GNLF councillor Deepak Gurung's house in Darjeeling town, the female GJM activist Pramila Sharma is shot dead allegedly by a bullet fired from Gurung's house. Following the outburst of violence Ghisingh flees the hills under police protection
	September 1	Bimal Gurung asks his supports to stop social boycott of GNLF and CPI-M supporters
	September 8	The central government calls the State government and GJM for the first of 11 tripartite meetings
	October 7	The GJM orders people in Darjeeling town to dress-up in traditional Nepali attire; those who fail to obey the order get their faces blackened by GJM activists
2009		
	January/February	Clashes between GJM activists and Gorkhaland opponents in the Dooars leaving hundreds injured; 2 persons die.
2010		
	March	The tripartite talks between centre, State and GJM turn to the question of regional autonomy and an "interim-council".
	May 21	AIGL president Madan Tamang is assassinated in broad daylight allegedly by GJM activists. He had been preparing for a public meeting in Darjeeling town. The murder sparks vast protests in Darjeeling against the GJM and Bimal Gurung.
	May 30	Bimal Gurung speaks at a massive public meeting at North Point College and reinstates his authority after the protest against Madan Tamang's murder
	September 26	Then Railway-Minister Mamata Banerjee is openly welcomed by the GJM during her visit in Darjeeling where she announces developmental projects.
2011		
	January	CBI overtakes investigations in Madan Tamang murder case from CID

	February 8	In an attempt to underline its claim to the Dooars the GJM initiated a *pada yatra*. When activists try to trespass the police-barricades three of them die in the subsequent police firing.
	April 8	Secured by the Electoral Code of Conduct, Subash Ghisingh returns to Darjeeling hills and holds massive rallies in Darjeeling town and Mirik; about four weeks later, after a violent clash between GNLF and GJM-activists in Sonada he returns to his exile in the plains.
	May 13	The GJM wins the three MLA seats from the hill-constituencies with vast margins. TMC leader Mamata Banerjee becomes new Chief Minister in West Bengal, ending the over three-decades lasting rule of the Left Front
	July 18	The GJM, central and State government sign a tripartite agreement on the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA); the new council will replace the DGHC
	September 2	The West Bengal Assembly passes the GTA bill
2012		
	May 1	The CPRM holds a massive May-Day rally in Darjeeling. Attempts by the GJM to spoil the meeting fail
	May	TMC announces to establish its base in Darjeeling hills
	June	The report of the Sen Committee foils attempts of the GJM to bring additional areas of the Dooars under the purview of the GTA. Despite protesting against the recommendations the GJM ultimately agrees to elections to the GTA.
	July	GTA elections; GJM wins all constituencies
	August	GTA is formally established, Bimal Gurung becomes chairman
2013		
	January 29	During a function at Darjeeling Chowrasta GJM Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is confronted with GJM activists shouting slogans in favour of Gorkhaland. Angrily she announces to be “rough and tough” and leaves the stage.
	February	Five of the absconding accused are arrested in the Madan Tamang murder case
		The West Bengal government passes the bill for the establishment of a “Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board” for the Lepcha community
	June	Thirteen of the absconding accused in the Madan Tamang murder case surrender
	July, 30	The union government announces the creation of a separate Telangana State. The granting of a new State entails widespread protests in regions demanding Statehood, including Darjeeling. The GJM initiates a month-long agitation including a 30-days strike. Bimal Gurung resigns as GTA

		chairman.
	August	Darjeeling hills observe a month-long general strike as part of the renewed agitation for Gorkhaland. One GJM activist dies after immolating himself. CPRM, AIGL and BGP join the stir. The State government deploys CRPF forces, more than 1,200 GJM activists and leaders are arrested. The agitation ends without any compromise from side of the centre or the State government.
		The West Bengal government implements the "Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board" bill
	September 2	Mamata Banerjee follows an invitation of the Lepcha community to Kalimpong where they convey the title "Kingchum Daarmit" (Goddess of Fortune) to her. The Lepcha defy the GJM's campaign of *ghar bhitra jantā* ("people inside the houses").
	September	Five more of the absconding accused in the Madan Tamang murder case surrender.
	December 16	Members of the GTA *sabha* pass a resolution seeking Bimal Gurung's reinstatement as GTA chief. Subsequently Bimal Gurung meets Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata.
	December 26	After the failure of the agitation in August, Bimal Gurung again takes oath as GTA chief
2014		
	March	Ghisingh returns from his exile to Darjeeling
		GJM announces an electoral alliance with BJP for the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections
	April	GNLF announces it electoral support to the TMC
	May	GJM/BJP combine win the Darjeeling seat in the national elections with huge margin

Appendix B. List of interviews

(only formal/semi-structured interviews; in alphabetical order)

Name	Date
Anonymous (expert)	6.2.2011 13.3.2012
Anonymous (GJM central committee)	13.5.2013
Anonymous (GJM core committee)	May 2012
Anonymous (GJM *Nari Morcha*, local leaders)	18.5.2012 11.6.2012
Anonymous (GJM zonal leader)	9.6.2012
Anonymous (GNLF leader)	23.7.2011 4.6.2013
Anonymous (*gram panchayat* secretaries)	30.5.2012 15.6.2012
Anonymous (*gram panchayat* secretary; Joubari*)	June, 2013
Anonymous (*gram panchayat* worker; Bagargaun*)	July 2012
Anonymous (*gram panchayat* worker; Joubari*)	June, 2013
Anonymous (insider)	22./23.3.2012 16.3.2013
Anonymous (journalists)	1.4.2012 14.6.2013
Arjun Rai (GNLF leader)	6.6.2013
Ashok Bhattacharya (CPI-leader, former Urban Development minister)	9.7.2012
Bharati Tamang (AIGL president; wife of late Madan Tamang)	11.6.2013
Bheem Subba (GNLF leader, MLA candidate 2011)	6.5.2012
Bimal Gurung (president, GJM)	7.7.2012
Dawa Norbula (Darjeeling Congress leader, ex-MP)	6.7.2012
Dinesh Kami, Padam Lama, Shyam Thapa (GJM leaders, Dooars)	17.3.2012
Enos Das Pradhan (BGP leader)	16.7.2011

H.B. Chhetri (GJM spokesperson; since 2011 MLA)	7.2.2011
John Barla (leader ABAVP; JMM)	17.3.2012
K.B. Watter (CPI-leader; MLA-candidate 2011)	7.3.2012
Kidan Lepcha (former journalist, Darjeeling)	21.4.2012
L.M. Lama (CPRM central committee; former *gram panchayat pradhan*)	12.5.2012
L.S. Tamsang (president ILTA)	11.3.2012
Laxman Pradhan (General Secretary AIGL)	18.7.2011
Lorez P.T. Lama (Darjeeling Congress leader)	14.6.2013
M.P. Lama (vice-chancellor Sikkim University)	8.2.2011
Munis Tamang (BGP leader)	8.1.2011
Niraj Lama (former journalist, *The Statesman*/Darjeeling)	14.5.2013
Pravesh* (GJM zonal president; later GTA councillor)	10.4.2012
R.B. Rai (president CPRM)	17.7.2011 2.4.2012 11.6.2013
Rajen Mukhia (Darjeeling TMC leader)	4.6.2013
Sandeep Mukherjee (DTA spokesperson)	15.6.2012
Shyam* (local expert)	4.3.2012
Suman Pathak (CPI-M leader, Darjeeling MP *Rajya Sabha*)	23.7.2011
Suraj Subba (GJM tea plantation union, general secretary)	24.5.2012
United Nepal National Front (leaders)	26.6.2011
Urmila Rumba (GJM *Nari Morcha* leader)	3.4.2012

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